A WHITE-HANDED SAINT

OLIVE KATHARINE PARR

K. Ziemann

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Do not blame me for the
underscorings in this book —
it was passed on to me
by the Assistant Dean — only
to be well understood some of
the passages he did is beyond
me. Please do not lose it
them. God bless you enjoy the
book
as I do. Howard

A WHITE-HANDED SAINT

A RED-HANDED SAINT

The Standard says: "It is to be hoped that Miss Parr's very beautiful and touching story will have the success it deserves. Those who remember her 'Back Slum Idylls' will turn eagerly to her next volume. In that earlier work she was revealed as a writer who knew her subject at first-hand, and knew it with a sanity, a geniality, and a wisdom that were delightful to witness. The first thing that will strike the reader of this new 'slum idyll' is the sincerity of it. It is written from a strong Roman Catholic standpoint, but the subject itself is so universal in its appeal that it should attract every reader, apart entirely from the question of sect. . . . Miss Parr's book is not a novel in the ordinary sense of the word. Its value is in its sincerity, in its truly magnificent appeal for charity to those who have gone under. At the same time, it is no soft, sentimental charity that the writer advocates—she is excellently practical, with a strong sense of humour. Hers is not a love that bends down from an infinite distance and allows a patronising pity to fall around the poor suppliants. It is rather a charity of an absolute equality—that knows no barrier of birth, and that sees in crimes committed only the actual revelation of a universal inheritance of sin. This story of Magdalen, the murderess who became a saint, is worthy of everyone's attention, even though it be only for a brief moment. No one can read it without feeling its vivid and actual appeal. It deals with life as it is—and yet it is optimistic."

The Boston Times, U.S.A., says: "*The Boston Times* is, in a way, a very cosmopolitan journal: that is to say, it is read by people of all classes and conditions, by persons of nearly every religious faith and creed, and even by those who have none. This is the reason why all kinds of books are reviewed in this department. . . . Thus it happens that to-day I am giving considerable space to one of the very best religious novels it has been my privilege to read in a long while. It is entitled 'A Red-Handed Saint,' and is one of the most entertaining and wholesome books in literary history. It is a tale of woman's influence, not in the political world as suffragettes, but as sisters and mothers who are striving to help their kind, and its pages are brimful of ennobling devotion. The story is about a murderess, but, in repentance, she is so sweetly good as to be almost a saint, yet is not sanctimonious. . . . This incomparable story is a most absorbing one, in which piety, pathos, and humour are happily blended The author is a very gifted woman, and a graceful, charming writer. . . . In this new book she has drawn the criminal characters and several others from life; consequently, the story possesses a realism and interest not to be attained by imaginary plots. Nothing in fiction can compare with the real living persons, and it is seldom that we are fortunate enough to secure such practically unique matter, treated by a virile pen."

A WHITE-HANDED SAINT

By

OLIVE KATHARINE PARR

Author of

"A Red-Handed Saint," "Back Slum Idylls," "My Heaven in Devon," "The Little Cardinal," etc.

THIRD EDITION

LONDON

BURNS OATES & WASHBOURNE LTD.

28 ORCHARD ST. W. 1 — 8–10 PATERNOSTER ROW E.C. 4

AND . AT . MANCHESTER . BIRMINGHAM . AND . GLASGOW

1922

Printed in Great Britain

TO

ONE

WHO HAS NEVER FAILED

MY SOUL

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PREFACE

For the third time, at the beginning of a new book, I find myself begging to be given no unmerited praise.

Since writing "Back Slum Idylls" and "A Red-Handed Saint," it has been my fate to see the other side of life—its heights, instead of its depths.

And I have been advised by those wiser than myself to embody these new experiences in a book which is the very antipodes of poor Magdalen's history.

For years, I was permitted to watch the cleansing of the besmirched feet of Christ in the city streets. Since those days, it has been granted me to see those who serve near His Throne.

"A White-Handed Saint" has had a wide circulation as a serial in England and America, and I take this opportunity of assuring many enquirers that the book is "life stuff," all of it. But as it is a delicate matter to write of persons still living, the story is sufficiently disguised to offend no susceptibilities.

I am glad also to have this chance of thanking, from my heart, all those who have already given to

the book their unstinted praise. This is most consoling yet, at the same time, too generous because I have become familiar with such subject matter through no merit of my own.

O. K. P.

VENTON HOUSE,
January 16, 1913.

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A WHITE-HANDED SAINT

CHAPTER I

PHYLLIS OR JULIA?

ONCE more, I am sitting at my typewriter, ready to begin another book. Beside me, lie, in neat piles, all the necessary materials: the notes of the book, as a whole: the fuller plan of the first chapter: piles of blank paper: some sheets of carbon paper: and my "incidental notebook" for swift, shorthand jottings when a too-rapid brain outraces even flying fingers on a "Remington."

I gaze at these preparations with the incomparable, exultant, almost *fierce* joy of the creator. Is there any sensation on earth to excel the sensation of writing? I often wonder if there can be. It seems to me to contain, in itself, the other arts. Music is here, melody, harmony, discord, pathos, delicacy, joy, passion, despair: painting is here, shape, colour, form, ugliness, beauty: drama is here, the stage whereon men and women, loveable and revolting, play their life-parts: life is here: and, first, last and best, here is love. All things are here, by the power of certain quaint black characters printed

upon white pages. In themselves, the letters are unbeautiful, colourless, soundless. And yet, according to my arrangement of these insensate signs, they will make you, my reader, laugh, cry, sneer, fulminate, rejoice, at my sovereign will and pleasure, while to me, the creator, perhaps the heart of the joy, apart from the sense of irresistible power, is the ease and speed, the effortless, lightning rapidity with which my brain-child can be brought forth into the world.

Yet, to-day, I am not happy, not really at peace with my art. Two lovely creatures are pleading for existence. There lie the notes of the book which I *ought* to be writing—strengthened in their insistance, by various plaintive letters from my long suffering publishers about the passing of time.

And here, in my obstinate mind, is quite another story—a story so vivid, so palpitating, bursting, overflowing with life that it drives away its step-sister into the mists of unreality.

It is the first time I have set out to write a book, since my own love story was recorded by the hand of fate. Hitherto, my books have told other people's love stories, real or imaginary. Now, the real dominating image is my own. And with mine, that other story, that pathetic, joyous, incredible, yet most natural and consistent life which was mysteriously interwoven with Leo's and mine, making an atmosphere for our wooing such as, surely, lovers never breathed before.

It all happened less than ten months ago. Every tiny detail is as clear as while it was happening —clearer, because perspective gives one a better

view than close proximity. Besides, there is my diary of the time, written, as usual, in shorthand and so complete that a stranger who had never taken part in the drama, could write the account minutely.

I hesitate — am lost, and my destruction is rendered eternal by the entrance of my husband, against all rules.

"Why have you come?" I ask, with a clumsy effort at annoyance, when all the time, my inconsistent heart is secretly rejoicing at his appearance. "You know I have told you, if you *will* interrupt when I am writing, I won't write another line, ever."

He strolls over to me, my lion-named, lion-hearted husband, and stands looking down at me, with an indulgent smile.

"I am not interrupting. You began it. If you weren't always so keen to pick a quarrel, and glory in a grievance, your muse need never have been put to flight by speech. Is it my fault that women can't hold their tongues? I should simply have come in for my stamp and gone away, in reverent silence. How much have you written? Show me what damage I have done."

He stands behind me, reading over my head, while I nestle back into the shelter of his arm, and scribble furiously in my notebook. Leo cannot read shorthand and it annoys him.

To my surprise, he makes no comment: simply lowers the carriage of my typewriter, saying nothing, when he has finished reading. Hastily, I twist round and look up into his face.

"You shall be the arbitrator between the stories. Fate has brought you in, at this particular moment. Which shall I write, Leo? Our love story? Or the 'wooing of Julia' as arranged? Would you be shy of publication?"

At this, he bursts into a peal of laughter. "Shy! I think you ought to ask yourself that question, not me."

"Well, of course, I should be, in one way. But I am not ashamed of being hopelessly and helplessly in love with my own husband."

"But what about recording the events of that vital evening?" he asks. "If the story is to be told at all, that must be confessed."

"I am sorry I ever told you one word about that evening!" I exclaim, snatching myself away, for the subject is still a delicate one with me, and the thought of writing its secrets makes me ignobly self-conscious. Then, with a delicious catch of my breath—no, not a sob—I realise that I am a naughty child—and that, in a few minutes, Leo will forgive me. It is heavenly, being naughty—because it is heavenly to try the strength and patience of your lover's love, and heavenly to see him forgive you. This is, perhaps, doubtful morality. I am not sure. I won't stop now to analyse it. And, anyway, I don't care. Of course, I am never naughty on purpose. It would break my heart deliberately to tease Leo. But, all the same, it takes my breath away, the rapture of suddenly discovering that I have been naughty—and am going to be forgiven.

I stand, hanging my head, seeing, of course, what a hateful, silly, petty, childish thing I have said.

But I don't speak. I love to make Leo forgive me before I say I am sorry.

As usual, he does.

He takes me into his arms, and looks straight down, through my ashamed eyes, into the depths of my heart, while I look up, through his grave blue eyes into his. And what we each read, as usual, drives away all discord. Then, still in silence, I stretch up on tip-toe, till my lips meet his, and so, once more, without one word, a naughty child is corrected, made sorry, and forgiven.

"My darling, write our story by all means," he says, when speech is restored. "Let dear Julia wait. I make only one condition, though, which as a dutiful wife, you must obey. If you write our story, you must write the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Don't shirk anything. Don't be shy. Don't think of any public. Don't feel, as you write, 'Oh, I can't, daren't, say that.' Just write your book for me—a common man. All the world loves lovers, and, God knows, there is too little love in every life. Let us share our happiness with others, while we can."

I am struck dumb, momentarily, at the blasphemous heresy that my Leo is as other men. But he takes no notice of my rebellious squirm, and goes on placidly.

"All men are alike—thank goodness. If you please me, you will please all. And never mind if you don't. The book will be worth its weight in gold and all other precious things, to me. But, if you do as I tell you, it will be the best you have ever done."

He pauses. And once more, I stretch up in silence, this time to lift a lock of hair from his temple, and stroke a tiny white scar.

"Of course, that must go in. Why, it's the most important thing of all, you dainty, delicate, suggestive witch! Fancy asking such a question as that!"

"Very well," I acquiesce meekly. "I think I can write *our* story—if no one but you is ever to see it. But oh, Leo darling, how can I ever write Percivale's? That is what really troubles me—the story of our white-handed saint. Who am I to attempt it, even? To desecrate it, even if only for your indulgent eyes? One needs to be an angel, writing with gold ink from heaven, upon earth's virgin snow—if his story has to be told. Doesn't one? Leo, comfort me! Doesn't one?"

I cling to him desperately, and await denial. But affirmation comes instead.

"Yes, one does. But as heaven has put these things into human hands, my white-handed Phyllis, my heart's guardian angel, must do her best meantime. Perhaps—who knows? Human hearts and hands and tongues are the best for telling human stories. Anyway, try. And the same thing there, mind—truth, pure and undefiled."

He has gone, leaving me a medley of joy, fear, courage, doubt, smiles, and tears.

At length, however, I dash these last away, and turn, pityingly, to poor dim condemned Julia.

"You will have to go away into my drawer for a bit, darling," I say apologetically. "You are too nice to mind. But, all the same, I am sorry. It

looks so rude and ungracious. And my poor publishers!—when they are such dears, too."

So I sit down, once more, the momentous question answered. But my thoughts will stray after my husband. I wonder if two beings who really love one another, ever exhaust each other? I mean, shall I ever stop giving Leo sudden, rapturous surprises which make him catch me up, anyhow, anywhere, in an ecstatic embrace of gratitude? And will he ever stop giving me that delicious catch in the breath that I stoutly maintain is *not* a sob? It is so queer; I say some trivial thing, not even thinking about what I am saying, and if I were thinking, I should say "I have said that five hundred times already." And it makes Leo suddenly rush at me and behave as if the remark had never before been made and as if it had opened out a new, dazzling vista. This afternoon now, Leo shows himself to me from a side I have never seen before. He has never spoken to me about my writing—never foreseen my difficulties, moved every rock and bramble from my path before I even get to them.

Then, when he called himself common and thanked goodness that all men are alike. I have always flattered myself that Leo and I are unique, Leo especially. What if we are just a common, typical man and woman, and if every man and woman who reads our story can say "Change the name and here am I?"

The idea is staggering. I sit still for a bit, to reflect.

Well, if we are common, Percivale was not. You don't meet a genuine mystic every day in the week.

(And I, in my conceited folly, said that mysticism was dead, may heaven forgive me—as heaven always does, instantly, patiently, completely.) At least—I wonder if we do meet a mystic every day—if we are all mystics in embryo—if it is only circumstance which develops mysticism? As Leo says, who knows?

One thing is clear—to do as he asks, and write the full truth. I wonder, by the way, whether this book will tell Leo more about my love for him than he already knows? I wonder if any man really understands every atom of a woman's love for him?

And another thing is clear: this will be the wildest, weirdest book I have ever written. Look how I have begun. I am writing it backwards. In the first three pages, I introduce my wedded husband when, according to all decent rules for book writers, he ought not to appear till the last three pages, if then. That comes of writing from life, of possessing an intensely alive husband to walk into one's sanctum and intrude on one's unwritten pages.

Julia's husband, now, would never have done anything so inartistic.

However, as Leo has chosen to appear already, there are one or two things I may now say in warning. Supposing this book is published and you meet it in some library, and glance, listlessly, at the first chapter, you will find some cautions to guide you.

If you want an up-to-date book, about smart people, put this one down. From occasional glances at certain London papers which Leo persists in taking, though they can never reach Blackcombe till

they are a day old, I have gathered that we are, in every way, hopelessly unfashionable. We don't possess a motor, have no electric light and I don't even know how to use a telephone.

Further, I love my husband, and this according to one set, would appear to be *bourgeoise*. If you want conjugal complications, elopement, divorce, and such things, this is no book for you.

Into my peaceful, old-world, sea-set home, these never enter.

If you want love, love to the right of you, love to the left of you, love everywhere, over head, under foot, all round, perhaps you may venture.

If you want a book which you can mark copiously —whatever man may say to the contrary, we writers know that a book which no one yearns to mark, is not worthy of its name—and then show to your lover, saying "Isn't this exactly what we feel?" well, you may venture, without any "perhaps."

Supposing you have no lover? You poor thing! Well, the lover will come—is already on his way, travelling to meet you. There is no life into which love does not come sooner, or later—even if it comes only to be rejected. And, when it does, then think again of Phyllis, and Leo, and Percivale, and Felix.

Now, Phyllis, this is more than enough madness for one afternoon. To-morrow, you must lock the door and begin your story in the proper place, at the beginning: and you must write, soberly, truthfully, in earnest.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF LIFE

HERE then begins my story.

Last year, in early April, I, Phyllis Lambert, aged twenty-five, of sound mind, and if possible, sounder body, possessed of most good things and without a care in the world, did find myself, one Saturday evening, established for a three months' stay in farmhouse lodgings upon the North Devon coast.

I had chosen for my desert, a hamlet called Black combe, six miles from the small town of Seaford, and within possible, though not easy reach of the Kingsley country: Westward Ho, with its moaning bar: Clovelly with its innumerable steps; Appledore; and further still, the sinister bit of coast along whose rugged blackness one finds names of places beginning with the suggestive monosyllable "mort." My own home is in Lancashire. My parents died during my early childhood and I have no sister so I reigned, from my teens onwards, as mistress of Thornton Hall. My eldest brother, Hugh, is the squire, and as he was not then married, Geoff, Archie and I lived with him. We were each born at Thornton, and I was the first to leave the dear old home for good for my three months' (?) stay in Devon. I came for three months, and am here for life.

How well I remember the evening, not quite a year ago, when we pored over maps and guide-books, in eager competition to find the most secluded place in England! To do it justice, Blackcombe is not this; but, after a lively dispute with Archie, who maintained—perhaps with reason—that a certain Inn on Dartmoor claimed this desirable distinction, I qualified my demand by a hasty decision that my desert must be at the sea.

"Mean beast!" he remarked, flinging the map of Dartmoor at my seasoned head, and disgracefully missing me.

"She was afraid I should win, and went and stuck the sea in to spoil sport. You can't do anything with girls. They never play fair. If you had wanted the sea, why didn't you say so, honestly, to start with?"

I remember how I disregarded, indeed scarcely heard these taunts, so absorbed was I in the coast-line of North Devon on an inch scale. All round England had the point of my hairpin travelled; inland, over rivers, hills and plains; more than once, it crossed to the Isle of Wight only to return: an irresistible magnetism seemed to lure it always to Devonshire. How little, then, did I guess what awaited me here! And how extraordinary it is, the apparently idle, inconsequent, haphazard way in which we are led to our destiny. Even now, I quiver to think what life would have lacked if that hairpin point had been fascinated by some other spot instead. I have always wished I could have foreseen it in time to keep the pin, that compass which guided me to my pole star. But it was just

a common, uninteresting always-slipping-down-the-nape-of-my-neck kind of hairpin, and its end was, probably, being swept off the carpet, one morning, for unhonoured burial in the dustbin.

Poor hairpin! But, anyway, I have got its better half—the map, bearing the hole I pricked in it, beside Seaford.

The reason why I wanted three months complete solitude was a very ordinary one: I had a book to write. I seem to have been writing books since my pinafore days: and I made an invariable custom of retiring into the desert for each new effort. The previous year I had visited the Highlands, and from far north-east, south-west was an inevitable transition.

Bradshaw condescendingly informed me that Seaford was merely a single line—itself several side issues from the main line, while concerning the existence of insignificant Blackcombe, he was contemptuously silent.

By writing to the clergyman at Seaford (my invariable custom when in search of desert lodgings) I obtained particulars of Blackcombe, including the information that the writer regretted being unable to recommend any rooms in that village and, as there was no church there, I had better write to the doctor, Mr. Randal, for further information.

"This looks like the real thing, Archie," I exclaimed gleefully. "Your Dartmoor Inn is civilised compared with it. There is no church, no shop, no station and no post office at Blackcombe. Peerless spot!"

"Then why is there a doctor?" sneered Archie.

"Don't you believe it, Phil. There's something wrong—a county lunatic asylum or rows of sanatoria, for all sorts of diseases, or something. You won't find such things at my blameless Inn, fourteen hundred feet above the sea-level."

Unmoved, I proceeded with my inquiries, which resulted in the recommendation to Mrs. Pearn, Halsanger Farm, Blackcombe, Seaford.

And here you have, link by link, the frail chain of trivial events which bound me for ever to Blackcombe.

It was a fine evening, my first, after a wet day. I consumed a late and substantial—what Archie would call "an ogreish" tea—and strolled out to prospect. Halsanger was an uninteresting, albeit inoffensive, looking farmhouse, surrounded by its buildings and standing close to the road, midway down a sheer hill-side. No other house was within sight, and, from the field in front of the farmyard, on the opposite side of the road, was an uninterrupted view of the sea. I sauntered across to the further hedge which formed a barrier between the pasture land and the cliff. Several wind-racked sycamores had perched themselves uncomfortably here and there on top of the massive, moss-covered wall, among whose uneven blocks of stone, primroses and delicate, scentless wild violets were already blooming. Giddy lambs, in charge of their sedate dams, gambolled continually across the green slope: and, as accompaniment to their shrill, fitful bleating, boomed the organ swell of the everlasting sea.

It was not peace, the message of that evening. It was life. Everywhere was movement: though

the sun was near his setting, a strong cold wind still flew on wide, restless wings, over sea and land; gold-tipped clouds with ragged, trailing trains glided irreverently, without even a genuflection, across the sanctuary of the west: each grass blade, leaf and twig was crowned with a glittering raindrop which flashed back the slanting sunlight and made earth, for once, even brighter than heaven. It was life—sunny, rain-soaked, wind-swept: quivering, eager life.

I looked and listened, thinking vague thoughts, until I felt thoroughly chilled. Then, sought the light and warmth of my queer little sitting-room, and information from my hostess.

Frankly, I am an inveterate gossip. I own it. Other people's affairs interest me—or did then—far more than my own. I love to make them talk and talk and talk, while I listen and listen and listen. And, all unconsciously to themselves, their idle chatter tells me deep hidden things about their hearts and lives.

"You didn't go very far, then, Miss?" remarked Mrs. Pearn, as she lighted the lamp. Here, I had better say at once that I do not propose to reproduce the incomparable Devonshire dialect.

"No, only across the field opposite. But if I had gone a long way I suppose I should not have seen anything very extraordinary?"

Mrs. Pearn laughed.

"No, 'tis a quiet place, sure 'nough. Nothing to see and nothing to hear, from year's end to year's end."

"In such a tiny place, I can't make out why you

want a doctor. Surely he would do better to live in Seaford and attend out here when required. Why does Dr. Randal live in Blackcombe?"

Mrs. Pearn gazed at me, reflecting. She was a buxom woman of forty-five, broad, even tempered, healthy.

"Why, it's like this, Miss: he doesn't have to go doctoring for his whole living. His wife, poor lady, is an invalid, and well off. The air here suits her and her poor nerves won't stand a large place. They have got a sweet pretty little property, sure 'nough, and he can please himself whether he works or not."

"I see," said I, making mental notes for Archie's benefit. "Well, it was he who recommended me to come to you. I was thinking of calling to thank him. Perhaps Mrs. Randal is not equal to making calls, and he wrote so kindly that I don't mind waiving that point of etiquette, to show my gratitude. After all, neither doctors nor anyone else are bound to answer questions from prying strangers."

Naturally, Mrs. Pearn did not understand the last half of my remark. But she seized, with avidity, upon the comprehensible point.

"And very kind it was of him, as you say, Miss, to recommend my rooms. I am sure he would like to see you, and Mrs. Randal too. She drives out a good bit when the weather is fine; and she dearly likes visitors."

("Then she can't be morbidly 'nervy'"), I said to myself. "Poor thing! it must be awful to be delicate."

"Ah, so it must, Miss," agreed Mrs. Pearn, with

fervour. "I'm thankful to say we haven't had a doctor inside this door since Susan was a little maid."

When she had gone, I strolled to the window, to watch the clouds again. Having burrowed deep enough into one box to reach a cosy *négligée*, a book, and writing materials, I did not feel disposed to exert myself any further. Then, glancing out through the uncurtained window, into the twilight, I caught a glimpse of a pretty idyll.

In the farmyard below, stood Susan with her skirt tucked up over a bright blue petticoat. She wore a faded pink linen jacket or bodice of some kind—a garment new to me then, but which I subsequently discovered to be a "milking jacket": and her ruddy hair was half concealed by a lilac print sunbonnet. Either the bodice was short sleeved, or these were rolled above her elbows revealing bonny white arms contrasting oddly with square red hands. She was calling the fowls, with a shrill sweet "co-op, co-op, co-op," and scattering grain lavishly among a crowd of red-gold Buff Orpingtons.

I gazed out, fascinated by Susan's picturesqueness and feeling horribly like a fashion plate in my flowing, be-ribboned, blue velvet tea-gown. Yet, this was Susan's working get-up, I reflected. I should have my revenge on Sundays and high holidays, when she would appear in some shapeless—worse than shapeless—ill-fitting dress of (probably) crude red, topped by a hat laden with artificial flowers. Never in my life, have I worn an ostrich feather or an artificial flower.

Whilst I stood, in a waking nightmare concern-

ing Susan's best hat, the living picture suddenly developed—and vanished. As the last handful of maize was thrown, a young man emerged from one of the barns, carrying a couple of milk pails. He was a comely youth, fair, ruddy, and slightly round shouldered—a typical yokel. He slouched up to Susan who appeared to court his approach, by advancing a step to meet him; then he put down his pails, and, catching her round the waist, stooped his face to the shelter of the lilac sunbonnet. There was a short pause, which ended in two guilty heads turning towards my window. I dodged back, as I hoped in time, but, when I ventured cautiously forward again, the pair had vanished. I pulled down the blind, rolled up an easy chair, threw myself into it, and stretched luxuriously out to the fragrant wood fire.

The events of the day, of the journey, flitted chaotically through my mind, but, among the crowd of other images, was the idyll of the farmyard. In a short time I found myself, with the instinct of the writer, giving my whole attention to Susan's love story. I knew no details, but a well trained imagination supplied these as soon as asked. And besides, there was the main fact, the essential, of young love crowning young life.

Then a strange thing happened.

For the first time in my healthy, breezy existence, suddenly this thing confronted me, from a personal point of view.

With the rapidity of thought, I found myself, amazed, in Susan's place: a humble country maid owning no dower but her strong red hands, with her

skirt tucked up, feeding fowls. And to me, not to Susan there advanced a lover . . . a man . . . my own.

Next, with equal swiftness, imagination failed me —and I was once more a rich, idle, velvet-gowned young woman—with everything desirable in life, except love. And, with angry amazement, I realised that Susan, poor obscure, hard-working Susan was richer than I—was, in fact, as a queen compared with me—all because she owned what I, with beauty, money, fame, possessions, did not own—the heart of a man.

Resentment, pride, contempt, filled my mind first.

Even if I had no lover, I knew all about love. Had I not written books about it—books that sold, that made people ask for more? Next, I found myself abusing my imagination for playing me such a trick, for stopping short before my lover had kissed me. And I tried to re-enact the scene, from the memory of my brothers' kisses. But it was useless. I was asking too much both of memory and imagination. The first said, "I cannot give you what you have never given to me." The second said, "I cannot give you reality, only the mirages of fancy." So I had to own to myself that a lover's kiss is unimaginable.

Before I could tease myself any further, the door opened and Susan herself entered. I sat up and looked closely at her. She was an ordinarily pretty girl, pretty with the prettiness of youth and health, though her hair was downright beautiful—real deep red, and plenty of it. I worship red hair.

She glanced at me shyly, as though wondering if I had seen the last act in the fowl-feeding drama. But I looking blankly unresponsive, and so she delivered her message, reassured.

"Oh, please, Miss, mother thought perhaps you might like to see the map us have got in the kitchen. 'Tis a very, very large one, framed with glass, so us can't take it down very well."

I assented and followed her—not that I wanted to see the map, in the least. I wanted to study Susan.

We entered the kitchen, a large, low room, with raftered ceiling and wide open fireplace in which hung various huge black pots.

The map was indeed a big one—bought, so I was told—from a commercial traveller some time before. I studied it perfunctorily and then went over to watch Mrs. Pearn washing eggs.

A big brown earthenware bowl stood on the spotless table, upon which lay about a dozen eggs, as brown as ripe hazel nuts, and as transparent as cowries.

"What beauties! Are you washing them before market?" I asked, picking up one to admire its delicate smoothness.

"No, Miss. Us be testing of 'em to see which to give back to the hen. Her's been sitting over two weeks, and 'tis almost hatching time. When the weather's cold and damp, us helps the little chicks to life, like."

Then, under my astonished eyes, by the medium of a little warm water, was worked a conjuring trick —a miracle.

Deftly, she lowered each egg, point downwards into the bowl and waited. To begin with, they simply floated, motionless, just where she had placed them. For several minutes, nothing happened.

Then, one began to move a little; fitfully at first, finally with a regular bobbing motion. Another followed suit, and another. With each, there was the first tremulous stirring, and, at last, the steady dancing up and down in the water.

"What is it?" I gasped. "Why are they moving?"

Mrs. Pearn smiled broadly.

"All live ones this time, Susan. Why, Miss, it's the chickens coming to life inside. If you had opened one of they eggs before I put 'en into the water, you would have found a little dead chicken inside. A proper little chicken, feathers and all, you know, but dead. Then, all in a minute, life comes, like—if 'tis coming at all. To-morrow, they'll bail. Listen."

She picked out an egg, wiped it carefully and held it to my ear. I stopped breathing lest I should lose a sound, and then—yes, it was not fancy—I heard a tiny, faint "cheep" . . . like a chicken in some far off world.

I listened, and stared, absolutely awestruck. For the first time, my eyes had seen, my ears had heard, life, life itself, life in its first moment of existence. I had seen and heard the invisible, the inaudible. I had been present when that mysterious, elusive, intangible, yet most definite and substantial spirit came from her unknown dwelling place to take

possession of dead matter. I had seen and heard matter become life. Yet of life herself, what she is, whence she comes, whither she goes, I knew no more than I ever knew.

As in a dream, I went back to my room.

CHAPTER III

THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH

NEXT morning, my first waking thought was about the chickens. As soon as Mrs. Pearn came into my room, with hot water, I inquired if they were safely hatched.

She was much tickled at my interest in so common an event.

"Yes, Miss, they'm all right. You shall see the whole brood after breakfast, if you've a mind to. Pretty little mites they be, sure 'nough."

It was a beautiful morning. The sun held his own against the rain, and the wind had dropped to a pleasant breeze. My bedroom faced the east, so I had the joy of a partial sun bath, during my toilet. At breakfast, I looked at my boiled egg with a new reverence. Why had I never before realised the daily miracles with which we are confronted? When Mrs. Pearn came to clear away, I unburdened myself upon one point.

"Doesn't it seem wicked and cruel to eat eggs? To think that one is eating the very essence of life, and that one prevents its development for ever," I began. Then seeing her patient gropings after comprehension of my unfamiliar mode of speech, I

translated: "I mean, doesn't it seem a pity to prevent the eggs turning into chickens? In a way, one is destroying life itself."

"Well, Miss, I don't know, for certain. Us don't think 'bout such things. But, come to that, I reckon it takes life to keep life going, sometimes."

It takes life to feed life? I wonder? How far could one push that proposition? There is a vague, magnificent suggestiveness about it as though life scorned to subsist entirely upon matter and must, periodically, feed upon her own essence.

Then I followed Susan to the fowl house. It was a clean, dark, cool building, carpeted with fluff and feathers. There was only one small unglazed window, up to which a miniature ladder stretched from the ground below: and, along this ladder, a portly feathered dame strutted, with pensive deliberation.

"Is that really for their use?" I asked. "How utterly absurd she looks. Why don't you leave the door open instead?"

Susan laughed.

"Why, cats, and dogs and all sorts would get inside. Yes, they all use the ladder. Come inside, Miss. You see it leads to the big beams where they roost. And, at night, us shuts this little wooden door over it, lest they should get up too early. These are the chickens, Miss." She led the way to a distant corner where an enormous yellow hen was sitting, with all her feathers fluffed out. Her wings dropped a little and were supported by countless little yellow legs. Susan laid a gentle red hand under her breast, the legs vanished, and out ran twelve

exquisite chicks. They were each exactly the size and shape of an egg, on dainty legs, with a soft head stuck in on top, and in the head, a pair of bright black eyes. The fine down which clothed them was as soft as silk and the colour of a child's flaxen hair.

"Oh, how utterly lovely! And how strong and quick they are already. Susan, are you playing a trick? You don't mean that these were really in those egg shells last evening?"

Again, she laughed. Evidently, she was amused beyond measure at my ignorance, and much flattered at my interest.

"They be the eggs, right enough. Look, I haven't cleared away the broken shells yet."

She pointed to a large wooden box, hay lined, and littered with fragments of egg shell.

"Do they break out themselves, or do you or the hen help them?"

"Oh, they do it themselves. No one else would know the right time, you see. First, they 'bail' as we call it—make a little hole at the top and work away at that. Sometimes, if a chick seems weakly, us may help a little after it has bailed, but never before."

"Susan, it is marvellous," I insisted, squatting down and laying a timid hand on the fowl's thick feathers. "Oh, don't bite! Now, let's keep quiet and see them run back again."

I drew aside, and, one by one, the agile mites trotted under the hen's ample breast, until her wings were slightly extended as before and supported by the rows of little yellow legs.

I gazed for some minutes, lost in thought. Then, last night's idyll rose again before me, and without stopping to reflect, I spoke.

"I wonder if that is how love comes? If love comes to life suddenly in one's soul."

The words died on my lips, killed by Susan's vivid blush.

I jumped up, and plunged headlong into explanations.

"Susan, don't be shy. You ought to be proud of it. I know you have got a lover. I was at the window last night. And I did see. Don't be hurt. I couldn't help it. And it's nothing to be ashamed of."

"I bain't hurt, Miss, nor ashamed neither . . . as you'm so kind. 'Twas my own fault, for forgetting that the rooms was let . . . or I shouldn't have forgot myself under the window like that. But if you don't mind——"

"Mind!" I broke in, with a laugh. "My dear child, don't be so ridiculously humble. Surely you have a perfect right to kiss your own lover in your own farmyard, under your own windows, if you choose. You don't know how it interests me. And I couldn't help wondering if love stirs in one's soul something as the bird stirs into life in the egg."

Looking back upon my stay at Halsanger, it is a marvel to me why Mrs. Pearn did not get rid of me the first week as an incipient lunatic. She did not do so; and, what is more remarkable, both she and Susan, setting aside the difference in our speech, even seemed to understand my maddest remarks.

This time, her reply was of the happiest nature. She reflected a little, clearly calling upon memory to aid her. But her unsophisticated nature was utterly baffled by its first attempt at self analysis. Then, as she could not answer my problem, she did the next best thing—perhaps even, *the* best thing—she turned the tables upon me.

"You will know yourself, some day, Miss," she murmured, half shyly, half slyly.

And then, unnerved at her own temerity, she fled before I had time to reply.

Her suggestive prophecy filled me with a curious tumult of feelings. I sat down on the edge of a bunk and reflected. What had happened to me, since last evening? I had written, often enough, of love, had known engaged people before, without any of this vivid personal interest being aroused. Indeed, my brothers had frequently chaffed me upon the subject of marriage. And yet no one, had given me the half expectant, half painful thrill caused by Susan's last words, in themselves so commonplace and simple.

At last, I shook myself up, impatiently, ran indoors for hat and coat, and started on a long ramble of inspection.

And, from love and life, I walked straight into ruin and decay. Following Mrs. Pearn's somewhat garbled directions, I found my way down to the shore, and spent some time by the edge of the waves. Then, anxious to discover a new way back, I ascended a cliff path which broadened, before long, into a narrow road leading out on the top of the cliffs whence there was the finest view I had yet

seen. For some time, I stood absorbed. The sea, that morning was intensely blue: and the masses of gorse edging the down, made a wealth of flaming yellow-gold against the sapphire. At last, I turned northwards, along the broad green cart track which ran beside the gorse hedge, and suddenly found myself confronted by a ruined building.

Then, I remembered that Susan had essayed an incomprehensible explanation of a walk up from the sea shore: an explanation delivered just as I was leaving, and which I ungratefully cut short in my haste to explore. I recalled the words "Turn to left and keep straight on till you come to the chapel ruins."

So this was a chapel, or had been, once upon a far-off time. I passed through a gap in the shattered, ivy-clad wall, and stood inside the enclosure, looking round. The building was of local granite and the east wall considerably higher than the others, showed the remains of a Norman window. In the south wall, to the right, there was a small niche or recess, large enough to hold a basin. For the rest, no other distinctive feature was left, and the whole building was too small ever to have required pillars. I soon found myself afflicted by the sense of melancholy which haunts all ruined places. Long ago, then, there had been a church in Blackcombe: a place of worship which, by common consent, had been allowed to fall to pieces. None other had taken its place. Why was it? If it had once been considered a necessity, what change had arisen, in the centuries to render it unnecessary now? Perhaps Blackcombe had been a much larger place and there were many

other ruins about—ruins of dwelling houses. Yet this scarcely seemed likely, judging from the size of the chapel which looked to be about proportionate to the present population of the hamlet.

Then, I reflected, religion itself has probably fallen into decay since the Middle Ages. Fewer places of worship are required now, though, doubtless the population has increased. For example, the boys and I are, practically, heathens. We never go to church "once in a blue moon," as Archie would say. And we are not startling exceptions to the general rule among our neighbours.

Religion does not interest us. We never pretended that it did. Neither does it interest heaps of other people, apparently. Here is an instance of it. Once, the Blackcombe natives had been sufficiently interested in it, to build and maintain a chapel. Now they are not. These ideas flashed through my mind, as I stood before the east wall. Then, suddenly, I found myself wondering whether I, whether any one in Blackcombe, *really* believed in God—believed in Him, for instance, as men did in the days when they came to service in this now ruined chapel. Or was it only that our faith no longer required the outward expression of worship? That problem I left unanswered, and then my mind wandered off to the unknown hands which had built the place, the unknown souls who had worshipped there, the nameless ministers who had offered sacrifice in some form. How many marriages had been solemnised on the spot where I was standing? How many baptisms had taken place, how many dead had been borne to their last sleep outside its walls?

A few hours since, I had seen life descend and vivify matter. Now, here was death. Life had departed, countless years ago, back to her own mysterious kingdom, leaving death supreme. They were dead who had built the chapel, who had worshipped, married and buried in it. The very place itself was dead. And Faith seemed to have died with it. All that was left were the ruined walls, gilded by the immortal sunshine, echoing the voice of the weary sea that is doomed to eternal unrest. As I listened to the perpetual moaning of the ocean, its murmur seemed enviously to assure the pathetic ruins that death, at least, was peace.

At lunch time, I questioned Mrs. Pearn as to the history of the place, but she was vague beyond the possibilities of vagueness.

She knew nothing about it, no guide book mentioned it, yes, her visitors often asked about it. The only definite fact she could recall was that one "Mr. Rogers, from London" had luxuriated in research on the subject. He told her that it had been built in honour of some lady much loved at the time in the neighbourhood who, on account of her kindliness, had been known as "the star of the sea."

I did not believe Mrs. Pearn. I knew there must, of course, be some county annals, some antiquarian records, something which would give a history of the place, if one took a little trouble to find it. I resolved that, at my first visit to one of the neighbouring towns, I would ferret out a library and, meantime, would write for some guide books. The lady with her alluring title lingered pleasantly in my

mind. It must be delightful to have a chapel built in one's honour, I reflected. But would such a thing ever be done nowadays? Were men more chivalrous centuries ago, or were women more inspiring?

The more I thought about the unknown lady, the more she charmed me. My vivid fancy seized upon her as the fit heroine for one of my romances, clothed her with all graces of mind and body, and gave her a suitable background of mediæval piety and picturesqueness. To merit the title "Star," one would need to be light in the darkness of trouble: "of the sea," peace personified amidst the storms of life. By the time I had finished lunch, it seemed to me as if many other things were dead too—among them, chivalry, poetry, mysticism.

"Supposing," I said to myself, "supposing you, Phyllis, were to live a long and virtuous life in Blackcombe, doing incalculable good to all in trouble, would its inhabitants ever be inspired to honour you with such a title, and perpetuate your memory by raising up a place of worship as your most fitting memorial?" I laughed aloud at the mad impossibility of the idea.

"And yet, why, why, why should it once have been possible, and be possible now no longer? What is the mystery, where is the change? This lovely lady, these men who loved her, who had been her true and gallant knights, where are they now? What *does* happen to life when she goes back to her unknown country? Does individual life cease to exist and become merged again in general? Or is that lady and are her lovers living somewhere, in

some form, now, sorrowing at the downfall of the chapel built for her sake whom they once so loved?" I scribbled these thoughts fast and furiously in my diary: then put them and all other such fancies resolutely away while I set to work upon my book.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYTHICAL WOMAN

For several days, I worked steadily. I visited the ruins no more, neither discoursed with Susan, nor watched the hatching of new chickens. Then, just a week after my arrival at Halsanger, the always late and leisurely postman arrived with a parcel. As soon as I saw the label, I knew it was the guide book and ordnance map of the neighbourhood, ordered the day after my discovery of the chapel.

I tore off the wrappings, and departed to the ruins, with the book. During the past few days, there had been a change of wind to the east, which had made sitting out of doors impossible.

Then it occurred to me that the broken walls of the ruins would afford some shelter—that, in fact, the higher east wall would form a complete screen between me and the wind, so long as it continued to blow from the gates of sunrise. So I planted my camp stool in the north-east angle of the wall, sat down quickly, and eagerly opened the guide book. I soon found Seaford, and, coasting down the page, came upon this entry at the bottom:

"Blackcombe is a picturesque hamlet, 5 miles and three quarters from the railway station of Seaford.

It is situated in an exposed position on precipitous cliffs, some four hundred feet above sea level, yet, at the same time, the rising down or moorland behind, breaks the force of the north winds.

"Blackcombe only presents one small feature of interest to the antiquary, in the form of some ruins on the verge of the cliff, ten minutes' walk from Halsanger Farm. These are the remains of a small pre-Reformation chapel, which is mentioned in various ecclesiastical archives of the county, though no date of its destruction is anywhere recorded. It was, in the 14th and 15th centuries, a chapel of ease which was served from Seaford, and was dedicated to the Madonna, under the title 'Star of the Sea.' According to certain passages in the archives, the chapel was never private, but always diocesan property."

I closed the book with a slam. Seldom in my life, had I felt so childishly and ridiculously angry. I was angry with myself for being so hoodwinked by Mrs. Pearn's story of the beneficent lady. How came I to overlook the obvious explanation of the same lady's identity? Of course, all ruined churches were pre-Reformation; and, of course, all pre-Reformation churches were Roman; and, of course, the Romish faith worshipped the Virgin. How could I possibly have been so idiotic as not to know better? Now, it was all accounted for. The whole thing was mythical, and, like all myths, doomed to destruction, sooner or later. The beautiful "Star of the Sea" was not a real woman, but an ideal: lovely enough, no doubt, but too mystical to survive the rough handling of the passing ages. She was an image of beauty, purity, queenliness, a vision in the days when men saw visions and dreamt dreams.

But those days were over, as much passed away as the chapel and the form of worship once held there.

Thus I reasoned. Then jumped up, still foolishly cross, and started off for a long walk, down the cliff side and round the shore.

In the afternoon, I was preparing to call and thank the doctor for his kindness in answering my letter concerning rooms. But, as I was actually putting on my hat, Mrs. Pearn knocked at the door with the announcement that Mrs. Randal had forestalled me and was in the sitting room. Accordingly I removed my outdoor things again and descended to find a fragile looking little woman of about fifty, leaning back at ease in the arm-chair. There was an expression of gentle, patient resignation on her face, which drew me to her at once. I never can resist the pathetic sight of any creature weaker than myself.

"How kind of you to come!" I exclaimed, gratefully, as she rose to greet me. "I was, this very hour, myself coming to thank Dr. Randal for recommending these rooms to me. Mrs. Pearn told me that you are not strong, and I thought, in the circumstances, you would not mind my waiving ceremony."

She took my hand and looked at me with the kindliest, most motherly interest.

"Mind? I should have been delighted and so would my husband. It is true I am not robust, but I always enjoy visitors, and we do not have a surfeit of them at Blackcombe. Besides, there are visitors and visitors. You see, I am a great novel reader and I know your name as a writer."

The tone and smile conveyed a delicate compliment.

"Do you really?" I said eagerly. "How awfully nice of you! I never expected in a place like Blackcombe to find anyone who had ever heard of my existence. I hope you like my books. And if you don't, I hope you will say so, frankly. I am thicker skinned than any rhinoceros, on the subject of criticism."

This time, she laughed outright—a soft ripple of laughter, exactly in keeping with her appearance.

"I like them immensely. They always strike me as being so happy. There are no problems, no worries, no complications in them. It is just bright, happy, normal, healthy life."

I reflected.

"You don't know how interesting it is to hear various comments—and how a book strikes the average reader—I mean the reader who is not a trained, paid critic. I never think reviews or trained criticism are the least helpful because they are so artificial. And I suppose from what you say, that my books are like me and my life. I am absolutely happy and healthy, and have never had any troubles, or even been in contact with any one else's."

"So I should imagine, not only from your books but now that I have seen you. But how wise it is when people write only of what they have experienced. Don't you think so? Somehow, I always flatter myself that I can tell whether a book is reality or imagination, and to me a ha'porth of reality is worth pounds of imagination."

"This is profoundly interesting," I laughed. "Do tell me now, how do the love scenes in my books

strike you? Are they personal or only witnessed, real or imaginary?"

She looked at me for a few minutes in silence.

"On the whole, I should say not personal. But this is delicate ground."

"Not a bit—to me. A young woman who has lived entirely with men and brothers perhaps loses the finer feminine feelings. Any way, if you had hurt my feelings, it would have been my fault for pressing you to criticise."

"Have you anything to do this afternoon?" she asked, suddenly.

"No. I had intended to call on you, as I say, so am free till after tea."

"Then drive back and have tea with me, do," she pleaded. "I should so enjoy it. And my husband will be in by then."

I accepted with delight, and ran up to once more don my outdoor things. When I returned, she was standing before my typewriter.

"I see you mean work. Are you writing a book now? Is that why you came to this solitary place?"

"Yes. It isn't an interesting book, by the way. It's a book for school girls. Fancy stooping to that."

And I made a face.

"But I am always willing to try experiments. And they have offered a very good price for it."

"Have you ever been to school?"

"Yes, I 'finished' for two years at a small college. So you won't catch me tripping there, even if you do in my love scenes."

To my surprise, she caught my hand and squeezed it quite impulsively.

"My dear child, what a great, free, generous nature you have! Do forgive me for saying what I did. It was indeed sweet of you to take it so good temperedly."

"But there is nothing whatever to forgive," I assured her, much touched. "I don't mind owning that I have not yet been in love myself. There are, broadly, two ways of writing, you know—the subjective and the objective. Some writers write about what happens to themselves. That is the style you evidently prefer. Others write about what they see going on around them, outside themselves. My books, apparently, fall between two stools and combine both methods. You admire the subjectiveness of everything but the love passages. Well, those are imaginary. Observation and imagination can do anything . . almost."

As I said it, suddenly there pricked into my mind the memory of what imagination had failed to do, upon the evening of my arrival. And the prick hurt quite badly.

"I love to hear you talk," she said earnestly. "I never had a girl of my own. And I love girls. Then I have, honestly, been more than ordinarily interested in your books. So much so, that I was quite excited when your letter came, inquiring about rooms. And now that I have seen you, I do so wish you would have stayed with us instead of all alone here in lodgings. It would have been a wealth of life in our quiet house."

I felt myself flushing hotly. Her motherly manner, her unusual interest in my unworthy books, her open admiration for my personality, crowned by such a

generous invitation to a comparative stranger, all affected me deeply.

"I don't know how to thank you. You really overwhelm me. I shall revel in coming to see you until you get so tired of me you will be 'not at home.' Perhaps you might like me less on closer acquaintance. And, besides, a writer in a house is a nuisance . . . with his or her perpetual click, click, click, litter of papers, idiotic preoccupation and other trade drawbacks. It is quite as much for the sake of other people as for my own sake, that I retire into private life when I am working."

She seemed quite unconvinced. And led the way downstairs, in silence. Outside the farmyard gate, a victoria, drawn by a pretty pair of bay ponies, was awaiting us. The distance to her house took about twenty minutes to cover, during which time she encouraged me to chatter of my home life. By the time we reached the lodge, I had given her a lively account of our mode of life, past histories, and general prospects.

"'The boys,' as you call them, "must miss you," she said, when we were settled in the drawing-room, by the tea-table. "And how does the housekeeping and entertaining go on, while you are absent?"

"Oh, just as well as when I am present," I answered laughing. "Our servants are mostly the genuine old family retainer style, who knew our parents and have lived with us from childhood. If they were not, Mrs. Cossins, the housekeeper, is more than capable of running the place single handed. I am the nominal mistress. She is the real one.

She nursed me as a baby in arms, and is a most sweet and perfect dear—something like Mrs. Blackett in 'Copsley Annals,' if you have read that exquisite idyll. As for the entertaining, well, we have not very many neighbours. A stately dinner party, once in three months, keeps down our debt of hospitality to the county. And as for house parties and visitors, we only invite the people we really want to see. So their name is not legion, either. And, moreover, they are mostly men—friends of the boys. So it really does not matter much whether there is a lady of the house or not. You see, Hugh being fifteen years older than I, is rather nice. He has been almost like a father and is a chaperon in himself. Of course, while I was in the schoolroom, Cousin Millicent lived with us, besides my governess. But, after I came back from school, and came out and came of age, and came into my share of the family fortunes, I was considered competent to be the only woman of the establishment."

She listened, always with the same kindly interest. Then the doctor appeared, and she introduced us in the prettiest way.

"James, this is Miss Lambert. I was fortunate enough to find her at home and to bring her back with me. We are old friends already."

He came over to me, took my hand in a warm, firm clasp and looked at me, with the medical stare. I always maintain that I can pick out a doctor from among all other men in a crowd, simply by his way of looking at one. His look is neither interest nor admiration: it is honest, simple, downright vivisection and nothing else.

I met the ordeal of the keen kindly eyes, with a smile, and returned his hand-clasp with interest.

"I am delighted to welcome you to Blackcombe," he said, in a voice as genial as his appearance. "The more so, as you have, clearly, not come for your health."

"Thank you very much. I call that a truly unselfish welcome from a doctor. Shouldn't I be much more interesting if I had come as a patient?"

"Not to me," he replied, with fervour. "Medical men see so much of sickness, Miss Phyllis, that they are the truest admirers of health."

Then he went over to his wife, accepted his cup of tea, and stood for a minute in a protecting attitude by her chair, gazing down into her delicate, ivory white face. He looked almost ten years older than she—a man of sixty or so, strong, temperate and in perfect condition.

"It is very brave of you to penetrate into this uncivilised spot," he said, coming to my side with a dish of little cakes. "Don't you feel very lonely sometimes, and homesick and inclined to hurry back by the first possible train? I am sure I should if I were a young lady, staying all by myself as you are."

"Then either you or I cannot be an orthodox and proper young lady," I answered, laughing up into his face. "Which of us is it? Personally I am without a nerve in my whole composition. And am conceited enough to feel that I am always in good company when I am in my own. Besides, it is not as if I came for rest. If I had nothing to do, no doubt I should

get the blues. You see, I am here to work, and it is mental, absorbing work."

When they at last allowed me to depart, I returned to Halsanger well pleased with the events of the afternoon. It was delightful to have found friends already—true friends—in such an unlikely place.

I wrote a glowing account of Blackcombe to Archie, that evening, describing the doctor's pretty house, charming garden, and bathing beach, besides dwelling at length on the kindness of Mrs. Randal to me.

The boys were never anxious about me; but all the same, they would be glad to hear I had already found friends of my own station, I reflected.

Then I sent a note to Mrs. Cossins, who always worried about my absences from home, and who heartily disapproved of all book writing as an unfit pastime for "a young lady."

CHAPTER V

THE GHOST IN THE RUINS

HERE, I stop short.

I suppose there is such a thing as "stage fright" in the literary world—a sort of writer's panic. I have never heard of it, never experienced it. But I am unquestionably suffering from it now. To be perfectly truthful, I am terror stricken at the sacrilege I am about to begin committing. So far, it has been easy enough. I have shown you Phyllis —Phyllis as a happy, healthy heathen: Phyllis up to the point of her life where she first looked, with ignorant, though reverent eyes, on sorrow.

Now, why have I written that? When I was pausing for one word in which to sum up what took possession of my life at this period, why did sovereign sorrow stand forth, crowned queen before her compeers, mysticism and life? Yes, crowned before even Love, the queen of queens herself?

Whilst writing about myself, it has been simple. But I have now reached the point, where, as I said to Leo, I ought to yield my task to an angel who could bring his gold ink from celestial regions and rise on wide white wings, to write the story upon the highest peaks of snow-crowned earth, high above the

gaze of prying human eyes, where only his fellow angels—and God—could read.

How dare I? How dare I attempt to translate into common, material print, the mystic characters upon the golden scroll of that glorious soul, which is lying unrolled before me?

I gaze long, with the eyes of my spirit, at the scroll. Then I take up, fearfully, the manuscript book of our saint's "confessions," which Leo has lent me. I have pored over it, many times before, yet never less fearfully. I turn the pages, not reading, simply admiring the clear, strong writing. It was wonderful how he wrote with his poor left hand. I wish I could photograph a page of it—and reproduce it in this book. It would emphasise its reality. And yet, why should it, after all, you foolish Phyllis? Why should it not be your own writing—anyone's? Well, you must take my word for it, as your only proof, that it is a real book written by a real person who lived in England in the present century.

And now, for the last time, I must put away oversensitiveness about my own unworthiness and incompetency and bravely continue the story to its end.

So I resume the thread at the point when I had been nearly a month at Blackcombe. During that time, I had made a thoroughly satisfactory start with my work, and had become downright intimate with the Randals. My spare time had been entirely spent with them, in some form. As the days grew warmer, Mrs. Randal took me, every afternoon, for a drive. And if she were not well enough, the doctor would come instead, on his way to a patient. Several times

already, on his slack days, he had driven me to distant places of interest in the neighbourhood—pleasant excursions these, involving lunch at some inn or other, and tea at his own house afterwards.

Upon one occasion, we had gone as far as Westward Ho to listen for the moaning of the bar. Dr. Randal drove to a particular spot on the cliffs and there we pulled up to await the turn of the tide.

"I don't promise you will hear it to-day, Miss Phyllis. No, nor any day. You might come here almost every day for a year and hear nothing. The sound is most capricious. Sometimes, it is not heard for months together. Sometimes, it will moan daily for a week. It is supposed to be due to certain states of the wind, tides, seasons, cross currents and all sorts of other unknown forces, re-acting on one another. I have chosen, as far as human ingenuity can, all the necessary conditions. But success is not with me or any other man. However, you can hear, now, the bell buoy, which is something."

We sat still, listening. It was a soft grey day, with no wind at all and the only continuous sound was the mare's quick breathing—above which there floated the fitful tolling of a bell, rising and falling with the heaving tide. It was a slow, sad, weird sound, like the dole for a passing soul. As we sat, silent, my glance wandered idly round the dim coast line and suddenly, my thoughts, without any conscious reason, flew to the ruined chapel. It was almost the first time its memory had recurred to me, since the day when I had left it, in a huff. And, with the memory, came a slight pang of remorse for my unreasonable mood of two weeks before. I

resolved to re-visit the mournful spot that evening, by moonlight. The moon was full, and the chapel, so Mrs. Pearn told me, was the best point from which to watch for the flashing of the Lundy Island lighthouse. I would not own to myself that any fascination, however slight, was drawing me to the ruins. I threw all the blame on the lighthouse.

"Listen!" exclaimed the doctor.

And then there rose on the soft warm air, a long low moaning something like the scream and rush of a far distant train.

"Is that it?" I whispered, awestruck.

He nodded.

The sound continued for some minutes, rising and falling irregularly though there was no wind to make it vary. It was like the moan and sigh of the dying soul for which the slow, sad bell was tolling.

Dr. Randal looked down at me with a smile.

"There, Miss Phyllis! You are honoured. I have often driven visitors to this spot, without success. One, indeed, has stayed with us three times and has not heard the bar moan yet."

"I don't know that it is an honour," I said, thoughtfully, as he turned the mare's head homewards. "Perhaps the bar moans at the people she dislikes. It is an uncanny sound, even to a young person with blameless nerves in broad daylight, protected by a Dr. Randal. At night alone in the pitch dark, with a lover at sea, I should be sorry to hear it. Tell me, is there any superstition attached to it?"

"Oh yes, of course. Disaster generally, so the

old wives say. But the natives are so used to it, that it has lost the authority of novelty for them."

"We can't, ever, hear it at Blackcombe?"

"No. It is too far."

To my surprise, when I found myself alone on the cliffs that evening, outside the ruined east wall of the chapel, I was not sorry for the protecting distance between me and Westward Ho. I am intensely susceptible to the unknown. To all of us, the unknown is great. But to me, it is colossal.

I stood in the shadow of the wall, gazing at the lighthouse which shone like a huge star, flashing between sea and sky. The night was as stilly as the day had been, but the sun had drawn away the clouds with him to his bed in the west, as he so often does, leaving a sky almost clear for his sister moon. A few bright flecks were left—mother-of-pearl set in steel blue—and Venus, serene and lovely slid silently after the sun, down to the under world.

Suddenly, there came to me the alluring title "Star of the Sea." No wonder men had chosen that, from among the Madonna's many other names. Probably, there was no lighthouse in those days when people worshipped in the little chapel. But there were the other stars, the eternal stars of heaven. I slid into a reverie as I looked alternately at sky, earth and sea: at the restless flashing earth-star of the lighthouse, and at Venus, embodiment of celestial peace, while as accompaniment to the melody of my thoughts, murmured the ever weary ocean, still praying, fruitlessly, for rest.

Suddenly, another sound broke across the wailing of the waves. It gave me a positive shock, coming

so unexpectedly at such a time and place. My heart began to beat violently.

Someone was in the chapel. Through the wall, I could hear a slow, light footstep. Once or twice, the someone's boot struck on a loose stone. Then the sound ceased and another took its place—the sound of a man's voice, speaking in an unknown tongue.

I listened, for once in my life, feeling really nervous.

The whole thing was, as I say, so unexpected, so unlikely. Judging from its accent and inflection, the voice was unquestionably that of a gentleman. Yet, by this time, I was acquainted with all the inhabitants of Blackcombe among whose ranks there was no one owning this voice and speaking in this tongue. Of that, I was certain. Clearly, the man must be a stranger. And what on earth should a stranger be doing at this time of night, in such a spot?

These thoughts flew rapidly through my mind. Then I stole noiselessly along the wall, trying to hear more distinctly. But the effort was useless. I stood, straining my ears and wondering what to do next. To reach home, I should be obliged to leave the screen of the east wall and show myself at one or other of the ruined sides of the chapel. Moreover, at any moment, the man might step outside to admire the view as I had done. I hesitated. While the monotonous declaiming continued, I was safe.

The whole thing was mysterious. The unknown appeared to be reading aloud or reciting, in an expressionless though clear and studied manner.

It almost suggested the recital of set prayers aloud. With this thought came another—an unreasoning idea which doubled the pace of my thumping heart and drove a surge of blood into my ears. What if there were, after all, such things as ghosts and this was a spirit re-visiting the scene of his former devotions? Then a hazy story of a certain ruined abbey, haunted by a chanting monk, completed the destruction of my hitherto blameless nerves. Flesh and blood could bear the suspense no longer. I must know the worst.

With a noiseless rush, I gained the south side of the chapel and looked in. But the sight did not restore my self-possession. Standing with his side towards me, was a man—bare-headed and dressed in a dark suit of some kind. His hair was white—more than white—silver. In his left hand he held a book from which he was reading aloud though I noticed that he only looked at it occasionally and seemed to know by heart, what he was saying. His right arm hung down at his side and the limp-looking hand showed almost spectral white against his black coat.

I stared, fascinated with fright. I could only see his profile, but this looked transparent enough to be the face of a ghost. He had no hair on lip or chin, and I could just discern the suggestion of a dark, downcast eye, deepset in a hollow socket.

When nearer, I could hear that he was reciting Latin, though his accent made most of it unfamiliar to me. It was a soft, Italian pronunciation, very different to that which the boys' tutor had taught us in our schoolroom days. As I listened, I could

understand a word here and there, and some of my rusty classical knowledge returned to me.

At last he raised his head, lifted his face to the sky, and closed his eyes. Then, very slowly, he pronounced some sentences among which I could distinctly hear the phrase "Ave, maris stella," "Hail, star of the sea."

My head felt to be spinning round. The idea of the ghost recurred to me. This strange being, whoever or whatever he was, spoke the language, used the title, of the dead.

Then, as I stared wild-eyed over the wall, suddenly he turned and looked straight at me, with the moonlight falling on his face, which was still a little upturned.

Never shall I forget that first sight of incarnate sorrow. The face was almost as white as the hair, though of a dull, dead whiteness. Even the lips were colourless. It was thin with a thinness which I did not know was possible to life. The very bones of the skull showed through the hair. Round the mouth were lines—no, more than lines—scars of pain, while the eyes that looked at me were dark, sad and patient with a patience such as no words can adequately describe. In fact, it was just the patience of the face which gave it its unbearable sadness. If its expression had been sullen, angry, bitter, I could have borne it. But it was the look of pathetic, hopeless patience which made my heart-strings crack. And, over the whole face, like a transparent veil was a look of such age that if he had said "I am a thousand years old" it would not have surprised me. Yet, underlying the age, was a subtle

suggestion of youth which added intensity to the oldness by its cruel contrast.

For a whole minute, I gazed into the face. Then reason fled entirely and instinct alone remained. I turned and ran as I have never run in my life before or since. Mrs. Pearn met me at the door of Halsanger.

"Dear, dear, Miss, how late you be. Us was just coming to look for 'ee. Whatever be the matter?"

"Oh do come in, do, and lock the door," I gasped, pushing past her, still mad with terror. "I have seen a ghost or something fearful in the ruins."

My terror infected her. She banged the door and locked it with a celerity I should never have expected. Then she hurried me into the light, warm kitchen and gave me a chair, all the time pouring out disjointed sentences of motherly concern.

"It was a man," I said, still panting. "He was saying something, prayers or something, out of a book. In all my life, I have never seen such a face. It was the very saddest face on earth, I should hope."

Light came to Mrs. Pearn before I had finished. Perhaps my description was more graphic than I knew.

"Why, Miss, that was only poor Mr. Douglas," she broke in, with a tone of faint reproach. "He wouldn't hurt a mouse. And he bain't no ghost."

An unreasoning anger against "Mr. Douglas" took possession of my mind, something like the unreasoning anger in the ruins a fortnight before.

"Who on earth is he?" I asked sharply. "And why does he lurk about in the moonlight, reading

aloud to himself and frightening defenceless maids out of their wits? Is he mad?"

Mrs. Pearn's face clouded—as well it might.

"No fey, he bain't mad. He's a poor gentleman who lives up at Pine Tree Cottage. Perhaps you haven't never seen it? He's some fond of they ruins. I only wonder you haven't met 'en there before this. Did you notice his hands? One is quite helpless. He'm paralysed partly."

"But who is he? What is he? And why does he love the ruins? And what is it he says there?" I clamoured, still furious.

Mrs. Pearn became graver still.

"Ask Mrs. Randal about it to-morrow, Miss," she advised. "'Tis a whisht old story. I don't rightly understand it. The gentry can explain it better'n I can. Have your hot milk, Miss, and go to bed after your fright. And ask Mrs. Randal about it in the morning."

Accordingly, I departed to bed, still in a pet, and had awful nightmares most of the night. Out of one, in which Mr. Douglas was pursuing me in my mad flight to safety, the same flight being, of course, hindered by leaden weights on my feet, I started so broad awake that sleep returned no more.

I lay, pondering. Anger against the cause of my terror shared her unlovely kingdom with annoyance at the sadness of his face. What right had anyone to go about with such an expression as that? It must give everyone the blues to see him. Why did not paralysed people considerately die, instead of clouding the sunshine of healthy lives? Thus I ruminated, given wholly up to ugly thoughts.

Alas! if it were not for the stupendous ignorance of our cruel judgments, surely their coarse brutality would be past even God's endurance. It is our ignorance alone which saves us. Otherwise, how could even Infinite Patience let us go on living and defiling His earth?

CHAPTER VI

INCARNATE SORROW

NEXT morning, as soon as I decently could, I flew to Mrs. Randal for explanations. She looked up, astonished, at my whirlwind entrance.

"Beloved Madam, don't be startled. Last night, I was frightened entirely out of my wits at the ruins. I saw a ghost there, saying its prayers. And it turned and looked at me. It was sorrow materialised—if it was material. I ran all the way home, without stopping once. And Mrs. Pearn says it *is* a live, ordinary human being, called Mr. Douglas, not a ghost at all. And that he is partly paralysed and loves the ruins. Tell me, what does it mean? Is she right? Or was he a ghost?"

My hostess raised herself on the couch, and laid down her embroidery.

"Mrs. Pearn was right. It is a frightfully sad story. Do you remember saying to me, the day we first met, that you had never been in contact with sorrow? Well, you have, at any rate, set eyes on it now."

"Tell me, tell me, tell me?" I clamoured. "Do you know him?"

"Intimately. My husband worships him But so does everyone, for that matter. He lives at Pine Tree Cottage, that little place standing in a group of firs, about five minutes beyond the ruins. Don't you know it? Well, it is there . . . a cottage with a small farm attached to it. It belonged to his father, and it is owned jointly now by Mr. Douglas and his sister, who live together in the cottage. The farm, they let and that is all they have to live on, poor things, just the rent of the farm. It is only about a pound a week. They are unthinkably poor. Of course, he can't work. And, afflicted as he is, he requires constant attention all day long."

"What a hateful story," I broke in, irritably. "Is his sister nice?"

Mrs. Randal sighed.

"Well, poor thing, she is naturally soured, you know, by their misfortunes. And then, she hates Blackcombe and wants to sell the place."

"Why don't they, then?"

"Partly because the invested capital wouldn't bring in so much interest as they now get by the rent of the farm. Farms, in these parts, pay well. Again, as it is their own, they are living rent free, in the cottage. So they could never again hope to make as much by investing the money instead."

"Why is he paralysed?"

"That is the saddest thing of all. He was nearly killed in a railway accident ten years ago, just as he was returning from college after ordination. He escaped with his life. But his right arm was fearfully injured, the nerves especially, and the left one less so. And he has never been able to use it since.

He can walk well and is, otherwise, strong. But, of course, it wrecked his whole life."

"Did you say ordained? Is he a clergyman, then?" I queried.

"Yes. Or at least—he is a priest. But he has never officiated. The accident happened, the day after his ordination, as he was on his way to London where he was to celebrate for the first time."

"A priest?" I echoed, wild, vague ideas running through my mind. "Do you mean a Catholic priest?"

"Yes. He is a convert, the only Catholic of his family. That, too, makes things less comfortable with his sister."

"Is she bigoted then?" I asked, astonished. Bigotry on any point was a thing no Lambert could even understand. Neither the boys nor I had any strong convictions about anything vital. We were too easy going, too indifferent, and too healthy.

"Yes, I fear so. She blames his religion for all his misfortunes."

"What an idiot! But, I say, what a fearful life! Is he nice?"

"Nice is hardly the word," she replied, with a sad little smile. "I should like you to know him and judge for yourself."

I sat still, thinking hard.

"Then if he is a Catholic priest, I suppose that was some sort of prayer he was saying last night. And, of course, they do worship the Virgin. That explains everything."

Mrs. Randal did not ask what I meant. Instead she went on giving information.

"He says the Divine Office every day—the prayer that all priests recite. And as there is no Catholic church here and the ruins were once Catholic, he uses that forlorn place as his oratory."

"I wonder he lives so far from church. I had a hazy idea Catholics were rather particular on those points."

"So they are. But circumstances alter cases. Besides, there is a church at Seaford, and he walks there and back, every Sunday, and often on week-days."

She paused, sighed, and took up her embroidery again, in silence.

I remained buried in thought. Point by point, I looked at the maimed life which had now crossed mine, and the more I looked, the more irritable I felt.

"I can't imagine anyone retaining their faith in God, under such conditions," I blurted out at last. "Can you? I am certain I should either commit suicide or live only to curse Heaven."

Mrs. Randal looked up, startled.

"My dear Phyllis, what an awful idea!"

"Well, wouldn't you? I should. I confess it, at once. And I believe we all should. Do you mean to say that wretched man can go on believing and living indefinitely? Look at the suicides for less than half what he has got to bear. I can't imagine one detail that is wanting in his miseries. And not one misfortune is his own fault. They are all apparently unmerited, gratuitous cruelty. He had dedicated himself to the service of Heaven, and after accepting his sacrifice, Heaven flung it

back in his face, broken, torn, maimed. Catholic priests can't marry, can they? No. Well, he is cut off from that, all his life, if he lives up to his conscience. Why couldn't they have broken him a day earlier and left him at least, heart free? Or why couldn't they have killed him outright? It would have been much more merciful. And at least they might have softened his life by giving him some of this world's goods."

Mrs. Randal sat up straight, and looked at me with an expression before which I ought to have quailed, but I regret to say I did not quail. I was too bitterly angry.

"My child, you are blasphemous. I hope, soon, you may get to know Mr. Douglas himself. This will show you how wrong you are to talk in any such way. Really, Phyllis, I am shocked."

I rose, angrier than ever.

"I beg your pardon. I oughtn't, of course, to have said such things, only to have felt them. I shall say them to him, and a great deal more besides, if I ever do see him. He won't be shocked and misunderstand, if you do. I am sorry I hurt you. But I am not one bit sorry for my sentiments because I mean them."

I ended this extraordinary speech with a wild embrace, and ran out of the house to the ruins, as fast as I could tear.

The run suited my mad mood, and I had been sitting some time on a fallen heap of stones, inside the broken walls, before I could even think collectedly, so full of tumult was my mind. Rage, pity, impatience at his patience, intolerance of pain,

twenty other emotions, fought like devils in my soul.

Then, suddenly, the inward tempest was stilled by the recollection of my remark to Mrs. Randal. "He won't be shocked or misunderstand, if you do."

What, in the name of wonder, had made me say such a thing? What had I felt when I said it? What right had I to answer for a strange man, especially a man of another faith, or rather, of strong faith, for I had none? The remark showed one thing clearly, and that was a blind, unreasoning confidence in my "ghost." What had caused it? Probably, his face, with its heart-breaking patience. The owner of such a face as that could never, surely, be angry with anyone—a woman least of all.

I jumped up, suddenly, mindful of such prosaic things as meal times. And, as I turned away, I formed to myself the desperate and highly improper resolution to come back to the ruins in the evening. I would deliberately throw myself in my ghost's way and try to engage him in conversation.

All day, I was in a quiver of excitement. I could settle to nothing, writing least of all. Mrs. Pearn complained of the poorness of my appetite at supper and when, at last, I set out, my heart was beating hard and strong.

"I am not afraid of ghosts to-night, you see," I said, lightly to Susan who was shutting various barn doors as I crossed the farmyard. "In fact, I am going to seek more adventures."

I walked rapidly to the ruins, then slowed up as I neared them.

It was another beautiful night, twin sister to the

previous one. The moon shone, and the stars: the lighthouse flashed silently at the sighing sea.

I listened. Yes, there was the monotonous cadence already. I did not mean to interrupt it, so I drew away and waited till it ceased. Then I boldly passed through the gap and stood beside him. To my surprise, the large, dark eyes glanced at me with a look of welcome. I had expected a cold, though well-bred, rebuff. To my further surprise, he spoke first, before I had time to frame a sentence.

"Are you the young lady who looked in last night, while I was here?" he asked, in his low, sad voice. "If so, I am anxious to apologise for the start I gave you. I assure you, it was entirely unintentional. You are Miss Lambert, are you not, from Halsanger?"

"Yes," I answered, relieved at having the ice thus broken for me. "But I feel that it was I, really, who was at fault. It was idiotic to be so terrified. I can't think what possessed me. I have never done such a thing in my life before. For the time, I honestly thought you were a ghost."

A slight smile flitted over the white face. But it only seemed to make it sadder by contrast.

"To anyone like yourself, Miss Lambert, I probably seem quite ghostlike even now that you know I am alive."

I glanced at him, puzzled. His ease of manner, and friendliness, his calm assumption that I knew a good deal about him, delighted me so much that I felt, momentarily, tongue-tied.

Then I recovered my self-possession, and lost my manners.

"I don't know," I blurted out. "My mind is in

a whirl about it all. I think it's the saddest thing I ever heard in my life. I long to ask you a million questions—impertinent, prying, indelicate, unpardonable questions, some about religion, some about yourself. I shocked Mrs. Randal past description this morning."

"And now you long to shock me" he interposed gently, though with another flicker of a smile. "Well, Miss Lambert, I will answer you with your own honest openness. First, I thank you, most gratefully, for your interest in such an undeserving object as myself. I confess it is difficult to see why anyone who is the very antipodes of yourself should strike you as interesting."

"But that is probably the very reason," I broke in. "Extremes meet. And you are absolutely and entirely *new*. I have never spoken to a priest in my life before, not even an ordinary priest. And then your story, which I should hope is unique. . ."

The words died on my lips, frozen to death by the horror they inspired, too late, in me. Here, at the very outset, I had put a rough, irreverent, unhallowed hand upon his heart wound: I had flung his priesthood in his face, had compared him with an ordinary priest, when even I could see how this mockery of a barren ordination must be the very core of all his sorrow.

But he looked at me with the same quiet kindliness, as I stood secretly fighting against a flood of tears. My self-reproach was so great that I nearly burst out crying.

"As you say, extremes meet. Though perhaps we are not so far apart as you imagine. I assure you, I

am a most ordinary and uninteresting mortal. Now, there is a *faux pas* for you! You fear you have wounded me. But, if so, you have your revenge. I begin by saying perhaps we are not so far apart, and then explain the remark by adding that I am most ordinary and uninteresting. Come, Miss Lambert, you have not said ānything so unhappy to me."

Once more, his kindness and his comprehension restored my self-possession. He seemed to understand my unspoken feelings as well as I did myself. Before I could reply, he continued.

"I will, as I say, answer you as openly as you have spoken to me. If you really wish to question me, please do so to your heart's content. I won't say 'unconditionally' because I want to make two conditions. The first is that you must never fear to wound me. You must treat me as if I were like other men. And, on my side, I promise to tell you at once if your questions are going too far."

I glanced at him, gratefully, thoroughly appreciating the delicacy which forestalled and banished my natural hesitation.

"May I begin at once? It is not late, not what I call late," I pleaded. "I have been thinking about you all day, and I feel as if I shall burst if I have to keep bottled up much longer. I said things to Mrs. Randal this morning, for which I had to leave her drawing-room at half-past eleven. I can't talk to Mrs. Pearn or Susan on such subjects. So, just think: I have been tongue-tied for eight long hours."

"It is indeed an immense time for a lady to keep silence. But I don't like to see you standing, Miss Lambert. Shall we sit down on this heap of stones,

or on the wall? They are quite dry and they retain the sun's heat for many hours."

I assented and seated myself. He followed my example, and, as he did so, I found myself covertly watching his movements. The fell disease did not appear to affect any limbs but his arms and hands. I saw he had a slight difficulty in putting on his hat with his left hand. He had to incline his head slightly to ensure the meeting, while his right arm hung limp, dead and white by his side. In seating himself, he used the support of his left hand, and when seated, lifted the dangling arm into his lap with the sound limb.

A rush of pity broke through reticence and consideration.

"Can't you use it at all?" I asked, with a lump in my throat.

"Scarcely," he replied, quite quietly. "I can't lift it and I can't close the fingers. But if it gets lifted into certain positions, it can do odds and ends, such as turning the leaves of a book."

"How white it is! Is it cold always?" I asked, suddenly filled with an irresistible desire to hold the poor lifeless thing between my strong, warm young hands.

I stretched them out, hesitatingly, but he allowed me to take his without any demur whatever. I felt a thrill when the poor weak fingers lay, helplessly, between mine.

"Oh, if I could only squeeze some of my superfluous life into it!" I exclaimed, angrily.

He glanced up. with quick gratitude for my sympathy.

"You are wondrous kind, Miss Lambert, especially for one so young. The young, as a rule, are not kind. But don't torment your gentle heart with such wishes. I am well satisfied. Who knows but that my barren hands may serve some unseen purpose of God's—some purpose which your strong young hands could not serve? Remember that 'they also serve who only stand and wait.'"

"Yes, but not a whole life of waiting, surely?" I exclaimed, passionately.

"Life is not over yet," he said, with firm gentleness. "Wait till we see the end. Some labourers went into the vineyard at the eleventh hour."

"That's just it," I broke out. "If I had been one of those labourers, I should have said 'No, thank you,' and walked home. I should have insisted upon my rights, upon equal terms. Of course," I amended hastily, seeing the fallacy of my attitude, "they did have equal terms in the end. But they didn't know they were going to have. They couldn't have expected it."

"No," he agreed. "They could not have expected it. But they had humility and trust and faith, and so they were rewarded with the fullest reward."

There was a pause, broken only by the faint murmur of the sea.

"Let us talk about you," I coaxed. "I do yearn to be concrete and personal. You know, it sounds a fearful thing to say but, according to our agreement, you are to scold me whenever you like. But I can't help wondering if you are a madman or a saint?"

This time, to my intense surprise, he laughed outright.

"If all your questions are as sublimely easy as that one, Miss Lambert, my rusty theology will be quite equal to the examination. I am neither. If you want corroborative evidence as to my sanity, ask Mr. Randal, who has known me for ten years. If, about my sanctity, ask my sister who has lived with me, the same length of time. You will be amply assured by both. All the same, tell me why you asked such a question?"

"Why, because I can't imagine anyone who has been so mocked by God, still believing in Him. And you do believe in Him, because you say your prayers here every day, and go to church on Sundays. If I were tried as you are, I should either go mad and commit suicide, or perhaps commit suicide first: or else I should live only to curse God."

He glanced up at me searchingly. Indeed, his look was so authoritative, so piercing, yet so sympathetic and so kind, that my eyes fell, abashed, before it.

"Miss Lambert, you are trying to shock me and not succeeding. Quite the contrary. You have been very wise to seek me out and question me. I admire and respect your courage and honesty more than I can say. To seek information at its source is the only rational course. You have heard about me. Your sympathy is extraordinarily keen—so keen that it overrides your judgment and such slight information as you possess concerning me. Perhaps you are not conscious of it, but the contemplation of my poor crippled life is being a severe trial to your faith. This must not be. I have, by my mere existence, inadvertently aroused in you, angry, resentful feelings

towards God. I see now that it is a *necessity* to be perfectly frank with you. There may be much which you will not understand, though I do not think you will *mis*understand, if you can follow my clumsy effort at so subtle a distinction. But, whatever happens, I feel I must in conscience, tell you the story of my life."

CHAPTER VII

THE HEART OF A PRIEST

THE following afternoon, I awaited Mr. Douglas's arrival, with indescribable interest. The previous evening, I had asked him to call on me at Halsanger. Already, I had outraged convention by throwing myself deliberately in his way without an introduction, though I knew this action had been nothing worse than the anticipation of having him made known to me by Mrs. Randal who would have introduced him at the first possible opportunity. Still, there was no need to continue my transgressions, apart from the fact that it was scarcely kind to keep a delicate man sitting indefinitely on a cold heap of stones, in draughty ruins, while he did me an inestimable favour. Of course, a ruined moonlit chapel, thronged with romantic memories of a dead past, filled, perhaps, by living unseen spirits, would have made a far worthier setting to the story than an easy chair in my sunny, common-place sitting-room. But, besides other considerations, I had a strong conviction that Mr. Douglas's story would be living enough to require no external stimulus.

I greeted him warmly. Already, I had learnt how to shake hands with my left, and aired my newly-

acquired skill with a feeling of immense self-satisfaction.

"I have something to confess," I burst out. "Sit in this chair, with your back comfortably to the light. I hate facing the light indoors, don't you? It always blinds one. Last night, you praised all sorts of non-existent virtues in me, and credited me with seeking you out in order to save a shock to my faith. True, you qualified your admiration by saying that, perhaps I was not conscious of everything. But I think it would be mean not to tell you that I am conscious of nothing more than common curiosity about you, and that I never have professed any faith in God. It isn't that I disbelieve in Him, exactly. It simply is that I have never thought about Him. And I don't want you to credit me with fine feelings that I don't possess, or to tell me delicate and beautiful things on false pretences."

The dark eyes looked at me with an expression of kindly admiration.

"Miss Lambert, I think I fully understand. And also, I fully admire. Perhaps I understand better than you do. One of my pet beliefs is that there is no such thing as a human being who does not believe in God. There is no such thing, strictly speaking, as an atheist. It is true that some people believe in Him only to curse Him. But they believe. The most blasphemous atheist doesn't hurl his thunderbolts against nothingness. Think a moment. We are, none of us, such fools as to denounce what doesn't exist. Take an instance from every-day life, from—say—politics. Your ardent Tory denounces Radicalism: your red-hot Radical fulminates against

the Tory—not because each disbelieves in the other's existence but because he believes very fully."

"I see what you mean," I said, slowly. "But it is very awful—much more awful surely, than non-belief."

He sighed.

"Yes. But let us stick to the concrete, which is that you and I believe in God, only differently. I suppose there are no two souls in creation who form the same mental conception of God. It is upon our conception of Him that our whole spiritual life is built."

"That's what I want to hear about, the whole of it, every detail you think fit to tell me," I pleaded—"your spiritual life."

He sighed again. "It is not a long or a thrilling story, Miss Lambert, and there is a singular absence of plot about it, so far. Well, I needn't go into the reasons which made me join the Church of Rome at the age of twenty-three. That I did do so, is sufficient for my story. What I must try to make clear is my vocation to the priesthood, my conception of what it is to be a priest."

I assented eagerly. It was an immense relief to me that he should have at last willingly mentioned this subject without waiting to be questioned about it.

"I think," he resumed, after a pause, and speaking very slowly—"I think, to sum it up in a few words, my notion was this: the priest is the man among men who is absolutely God's and the people's—and all the more the people's, for being so wholly God's. He is God's first, and the people's, second. He, his whole existence of body and soul, every nerve and

fibre of his being, every heart-beat, every drop of blood, every breath, every movement of his mind, all go to make him a living, conscious, complete, consenting victim of God's, offered daily, hourly to God for God's sake and His people's. He offers himself as a perpetual oblation of praise to God: praise for those fellow-creatures who never praise. And I hope, with a hope which is more than hope because it is more than faith, it is almost sight—I hope that the absolute completeness of this oblation compensates to God, for the homage of which some men rob Him."

I listened, awestruck, confounded. I felt, somehow, as if I ought to be kneeling to listen. Already, this white-handed saint had convicted me of half a dozen unconscious wrongdoings.

"Of course," he continued, after another pause, "such a life as this is not exclusively the priest's. Thousands of men and women are living it all over the world to-day. Some are monks, some nuns. Some are men and women living in the world; some perhaps are married and the fathers and mothers of families. The real difference between the priest and other men is this: the priest is not only God's victim, His voluntary victim: he is His official victim. He is accepted, signed, sealed, anointed, publicly and solemnly by the Church. He consecrates himself by his vow of perpetual chastity and he is, in return, consecrated by a special Sacrament which makes him, as I say, God's official victim, gives him the official right to offer to heaven, the most stupendous sacrifice of earth. It is in this offering that the essence of the priesthood consists. He administers

the Sacraments to his fellow men and this power of administration also is part of the essential character of the priesthood. But the essence of the essence, the very summit and crown of his life is in the offering of that Sacrifice which alone gives adequate, because infinite, praise and thanksgiving to God, which alone makes adequate, because infinite, reparation and supplication for the people. The priest is peculiarly God's victim because he alone is empowered to offer up the Eternal and Infinite Victim. I don't know that I need go into our faith about the Mass. Perhaps you know a little about it already. If not, then you will take my word for it that it is dearer to the priest than life itself. Many have already died for it. Many still to come will shed their blood and lay down their lives for the sake of celebrating one Mass."

The dazzling beauty of the vision of such lives, which vision had burst on me without the slightest preparation: the unutterable pathos of this priest yet no priest, this discrowned, though anointed life were, both, too much for my self-possession.

"And you have never said Mass and never will. And then you expect me not to hate God for being so cruel to you," I exclaimed, breaking into a passion of tears.

For several minutes, there was no answer, no sound. When his reply did come, it galvanised me into composure.

"Miss Lambert, forgive me for saying so, but you are causing me pain. For one thing, I cannot bear to see you suffering for my unworthy sake. For another, . . ."

He broke off. But the few words gave me yet more insight.

"It is you who must forgive me," I exclaimed, raising my head and resolutely wiping away my tears. "I see now that some forms of sympathy can be selfish. Please go on."

"That is my ideal of the priesthood," he resumed. "And, of course, it presupposes the striving after perfection of life and soul. The victim must go on becoming more worthy of acceptance. Well, as you know, I was ordained. I will not try to describe what emotions fill the priest's heart on his ordination day. On my way home, to celebrate my first Mass, as you also know, I was struck down by this accident. That was ten years ago. For a long time, there was hope that returning health might reanimate the paralysed nerves. But, after the first six or nine months, that hope had to be abandoned. Then, of course, came the supreme trial, the almost overpowering temptation not to serve. For months, I lived in a veritable hell. I was besieged by all the thoughts you have mentioned, only they came with a vivid intensity you could never even conceive. Hatred of God, a fierce craving to throw off His yoke entirely, a luridly attractive vision of unlawful pleasures, all fought like the devils they were, for my acceptance. To this day, their hideous forms appear to me, at times. Yes, Miss Lambert, I am only human. You asked me last night, if I were a saint. Now you know I am nothing but a struggling mortal, made of common flesh and blood: a mortal who has been through floods and fires of temptation and who will continue to pass through them, occa-

sionally, to the end. Among others, the thought of self-destruction sometimes assails me. But, as long as I do not yield to them, and am certain I do not displease God, I bear them, almost with gladness. The service of pain is passing dear to me. It is only in this life, this short, short life, we shall have the chance to suffer. For all eternity, our service will be joy."

He stopped again and I sat silent, far too awed to speak.

"At last," he went on, rousing himself, "I made one huge effort to gather the shattered forces of my life together and piece them into a scarred, maimed whole. The dream of my life had been to restore the old worship to Blackcombe, to offer once more, the Infinite Sacrifice in a place where once it had been offered. I believed that this was my mission, the meaning of my life. Our tiny foothold here, my call to the old faith and the priesthood, seemed part of a perfect whole. I was to be the apostle of this lonely seaside, the Lord's lily in this desert, the one chosen out from among many to build up what had long lain low. I was to be our gracious Lady's gallant knight, a knight with 'Ave Maris Stella' for his war-cry, with white fleurs-de-lis upon his azure shield. I would toil and screw and scrape till I had once more raised up a chapel in her honour. This was the very *raison d'être* of my existence. And then, when at last I left hospital and returned home, what did I find?"

This time, the pause was longer than ever.

"By God's infinite, patient, tender mercy," he said, in a tone so low and tremulous that I could scarcely hear him, "I found that I was still His

priest, even if my anointed hands were empty and barren. I found I was still Our Lady's knight, even if I had heen hopelessly crippled before striking my first blow for my queen. My soul, my faith, had been brought by God safely through the fires and floods of hellish temptation. And so I took up my life, my call, as His living victim here. I cannot understand His will. But what is better, I can bow to it, nay more, embrace it. I cannot offer the supreme sacrifice. But I can offer the next best thing to it, the Divine Office, the praises which flow for ever from the 'os ecclesiæ,' the mouth of the Church. I can be His unseen, unknown, lily in the desert, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, not crying to warn men, crying simply praise to heaven. And, with each day, I can strive to become more perfect that, in the end, the victim may be without flaw in the sight of God. Sometimes, a fond and foolish fancy comes to me and makes me think that perhaps, by glad resignation, I may even do God more homage than if I had been a normal priest. Perhaps if I ever attain to the heights of *thanking* Him for my shattered life, I shall give Him more glory than if I had had to thank Him for an ordinary life. The measure of our love is the measure of the glory we give Him. And it takes more love to thank Him for this than it would to thank Him for an officiating priesthood. I don't know. But I strain always to those heights, hoping to reach them in the end. At other times, it seems to me that God is angry with me and has cast me away as worthless. But this does not trouble me. How can it? I am wholly His, I could not make

myself more His than I am. And if I am His, He can do what He likes with me. If it pleases Him to cast me out, I am still His, even if I am nothing better than His outcast. So, you see, however you look at it, my life—apart from the occasional surface storms—is nothing but one vast incarnate peace."

For a long long time, we sat in silence, he with that light on his face which never is on land or sea: I, with my wild passions utterly subdued by the unearthly beauty of the so-called shattered useless life.

In all his story, the point which most appealed to me was the daily living of his life for God alone. He believed in God, loved Him, and acted consistently upon both.

Then, to my intense surprise, and somewhat to my terror, I found myself looking at the thing from God's point of view. How more than dear and precious must such a life be to Him. If there were a God at all, such a life could not but touch Him profoundly. Then I broke, terrified, from this clinging thought. Who was I, to look at anything through the Divine eyes? And yet, I longed to. Suddenly, the memory of the liege Lady, the lovely, shadowy woman returned to me. She, at least, was human. I might dare, for a short time, to imagine myself in her place without feeling that I deserved to be struck dead. Supposing she was still living somewhere and was still able to watch the ways of men, this knight of hers must be as dear to her as any who lived in her own day. Nay, he must be even dearer, for the service of sight must have been comparatively easy: the service of faith was hard

hard, hard. Supposing I, Phyllis, could have such a gallant knight during my life, how I should love and value him But supposing I had been living hundreds of years in another unseen, unsubstantial world, and my spirit could see such a man upholding my memory and those interests which were nearest to my heart in my earthly days, should I not love him doubly well?

These thoughts and many others, deeper and more subtle, so completely absorbed me that when Mr. Douglas took leave, I asked no more questions and scarcely spoke, except to thank him in halting words for his exceeding kindness.

I returned to my room, after letting him out, and sat down in the chair he had occupied. And, for a brief space, to me, poor heathen Phyllis, the spirit world, the mystical life were more real than these material ones.

Here, I break off in my story to open his book of confessions. Like S. Augustine's, they are written colloquially. I turn the pages till I come to one of my favourite passages.

Dec. 9, 19—.—"Lord, how canst thou abide with me after such a day as this has been? I am frightened almost out of my senses, have had a regular attack of panic. My soul is utterly darkened by the miseries of my body. I cannot pray, cannot regain my peace. I am utterly ashamed that Thou shouldst dwell in so disturbed a heart. How canst Thou remain with me, O Infinite Patience? And why cannot I overcome these fits of terror which so disgust me?

Ah, Lord, this is the answer. With unutterable patience Thou dost turn even these miseries into

good. If I were never unworthy, how couldst Thou as forcibly bring home to me the tenderness of Thy love? I see now that Thou feelest love for me, even when I feel only disgust for myself. Thou lovest me, when I, wrongly, loathe myself. And these storms, this darkening of my higher nature, show me, too, how all the good in me is from Thee. I will not grieve at them any longer. My very weaknesses, Lord, shall be Thy servants and shall glorify Thee, for the weaker and unworthier a soul is, the more does it show Thy tenderness in lifting it up and adorning it for Thyself. My very faults shall serve Thee and shall be the pearls of Thy Divine Patience, the rubies of Thy love, the diamonds of Thy Merciful Compassion."

This passage shows the indomitable *trust* of his soul in God. In the very midst of his panic, he forces himself to calm. And utterly alone in the pathless desert of despair, he stands firm and, by the alchemy of love, transforms the barren stones of the waste into everlasting jewels.

CHAPTER VIII

A GOLDEN WORLD

After tea, that evening, I strolled down to the orchard, still in a waking dream. It was too early yet for more than the promise of apple blossom, but young Queen May was resourceful and prodigal. All along the north hedge, she had flung such masses of other blossom that its glory was almost unbearable. I stood there looking up, down, along: then turned round and looked again, up, down along: and wherever I looked were masses of white and gold, the white of blackthorn, the flaming gold of the gorse. I often think blackthorn is the daintiest, airiest, purest looking of all the wild blossom, because of its absence of green. It is like white mist, clinging thick, to bare branches. The gorse, too, with its absence of leafy foil, and its blazing blossoms growing so close that not even the prickles can separate them—there is another sign of earth's eagerness to burst into flower. She cannot wait to do things in the conventional way and let the green leaves appear first. The middle of the orchard was jewelled with marsh marigold among whose shining chalices white lambs gambolled. Yes, earth and May together had painted a living

picture in white and gold, gold and white: the very sky was a sheet of mother-of-pearl without one glimpse of blue to stain its purity. And as I stood, encircled, it seemed as if the life just shown to me, had blossomed into visible form: white for its stainlessness, gold for its glory. And, still dreamily, yet very vividly, I found myself wondering whether all such lives did not make a dazzling lustre, over the dull dark earth, a lustre upon which even high Heaven could look with complacence from its own regions of celestial glory.

How long I dreamt, in my bower of blossom, I don't know. Probably quite a short time. When I regained the high road, I heard the sound of wheels, and turned round to see Dr. Randal bowling towards me, in his high dog-cart. He pulled up, as he always did, and greeted me with enthusiasm.

"I am in luck this evening, Miss Phyllis. A call has just come to Stonehill Farm, three miles off. And behold, I meet a charming damsel actually as I start. Don't say you are busy and can't come. It's a perfect evening for a drive. Listen to the cuckoos, if you don't believe me."

"I believe you and the cuckoos and my own senses and all other evidence," I laughed, springing up beside him. "I am simply aching for someone to talk to. First, is Mrs. Randal very angry with me? I am going to write her a letter of more abject apology this evening."

He looked puzzled.

"Eva angry with you? How could she be? What made you think so?"

Penitently, I recounted my misdemeanours of the

previous morning. He seemed more amused than anything.

"She did tell me something about it, now you mention it. But she wasn't angry, in the very least. In fact, she is longing to introduce you to Douglas."

Upon this, I made further confession—full and detailed confession. He listened, keenly attentive.

"Well, and what do you feel like? Has he converted you?"

I literally gasped.

"Converted me? To Catholicism, do you mean? No, certainly not. He never attempted to. He didn't controvert once. He didn't attack any man's faith or creed. Neither did he mention any dogma, that I can remember. He simply told me the ideal, the aim of his own inner life."

"Well, and hasn't that converted you?" he persisted, with a twinkle. "What do you feel like?"

"I feel as if all the world were white and gold," I said, laughing. "It sounds mad, but I can't describe it in any other way."

"Probably you could scarcely describe it in any better way."

"And it's a real white and gold," I continued confidentially. "As real as the thorn blossom and the gorse. It won't vanish away when I open my eyes. Do you understand? Or is she a mad, mad Phyllis?"

"I think I understand. Remember, I too, know Percivale, have known him for a long time."

"Do you call him by his Christian name?" I asked, a little surprised.

"Yes. Somehow it suits him. And he is young enough to be my son."

I stared. Then I remembered the suggestive look of youth underlying the veil of age on the patient face.

"Do you know, it never occurred to me to think how old or how young he is," I exclaimed. "He might be anything, simply. As a matter of fact, how old is he?"

"Thirty-eight. Ought to be just in the prime of life, poor fellow."

"I wish, by the way, that you would call me by my Christian name, and drop the 'Miss.' Mrs. Randal does. She is nice," I said, pointedly.

He laughed.

"Thank you. I shall be only too glad to. Perhaps then I may get nice too, in time."

"I tell you what I don't think is nice of either of you, and that is not to have told me about Mr. Douglas sooner. I might never have met him, if it hadn't been for that chance meeting in the ruins."

The doctor reflected.

"Yes, now you mention it, it seems curious his name shouldn't have cropped up and that you shouldn't have met him at our house. Still, our conversation has been about widely different things, hasn't it? And he isn't going out much, just now. Not that he ever does, except to us, and only then when he is not likely to meet other guests. But he is rather absorbed at present in a book he is writing."

I looked up, intensely interested.

"A book? What about?"

"Nothing original, I fancy. A translation of some German work on mysticism."

That alluring word recalled an old train of thought.

"You as a doctor must see a lot of people's souls," I said, thoughtfully. "Tell me, in your experience, do most people believe in God? And how do they face death?"

"In some form, and more or less, I think they always believe. But, often, the faith is nothing more than a fear of the unknown. As for facing death, well, many don't know they are facing it. Nature has her own merciful anodynes for that ordeal, Phyllis. Some face it like brave animals at bay. Others, wholly indifferently. It is very rare to see what I should call an all-round conscious, consistent Christian facing of death. And yet, mind you: I don't believe there was ever a time in the world's history when man sought more eagerly after God, or desired, more impatiently, to pierce the veil of matter. The relationship of the human soul with God, what will happen to us after death, these thoughts occupy our minds much more than we have any idea of."

"Is it to be wondered at?" I exclaimed, passionately. "They are *awful* questions. And no certainty anywhere."

The kind gray eyes, eyes so used to looking on human pain, gazed down into mine as if they understood.

"You will find certainty, some day, Phyllis, I think. A doctor, if he's worth his salt, is half a priest. Psychology and physiology can't be separated any more than soul and body can, without causing

death. I am a searcher of hearts besides being a healer of bodies. Some day I think you will find certainty. But, for you, I think there will be only one road to it: not the road of reason, or history, or controversy, but the road of love."

I was hushed into silence. This strong wise man commanded more respect and affection, the more I knew of him. Moreover, something within me thrilled to his words with such expectancy and such pain that I felt they were a true prophecy.

We, neither of us, spoke much during the homeward drive, at the end of which I went in to remake my peace with Mrs. Randal, and was at once asked to dinner.

Two days later, I set out for Pine Tree Cottage. I wanted to return Mr. Douglas's call and to make the acquaintance of his sister.

It was a pretty little place, very different to Halsanger though not nearly so large. It appeared to be a small farmhouse, with a cottage adjoining it, both under one long thatched roof which had pushed its thick hood comfortably down over the casement windows. A group of black firs stood behind the building and a climbing rose in half-leaf, scrambled over the stone porch.

I knocked, with my stick, on the latch-handled door. There was no bell or knocker. To my astonishment, my summons was promptly answered by a handsome young woman.

"Is Mr. Douglas at home?" I asked, somewhat taken aback at this apparition. "And if Miss Douglas is not busy, and is in, might I see her too?"

"Certainly. I am Miss Douglas," she answered, crisply.

To say that I was still more surprised is to put it mildly. I was electrified. Why, I never shall understand, but my mental eye had formed a totally different picture of Mr. Douglas's sister. When I recall Mrs. Randal's mention of her, that first day, certainly she gave me no reason for thinking she spoke of an elderly woman, considerably older than Mr. Douglas himself. But, all the same, this was the idea I had formed of it. I had pictured a shrewish, withered, vinegary old spinster. Instead, I was staring, speechless, into a pair of bright brown eyes set in a brilliant face, and all owned by a tall, plump, dignified young person who didn't look a day older than myself.

"Indeed!" I stammered at last. "Oh, if I am not intruding and you are not busy, I have only come to call."

At this, she softened into hospitality.

"Come in. I didn't understand at first. Now, of course, I remember. My brother told me you kindly said you were coming. I hope you will excuse me for not calling on you. I didn't know if you wanted to see *me*."

She led the way into a quaint room, half sitting-room, half kitchen, with a deep window seat, a large open fire-place, and a stone floor covered with thick matting.

"Of course, I should have been very glad to see you. And I hope you will come."

Her somewhat hard, scornful expression relaxed a little more as she thanked me and ran upstairs to call her brother There seemed to be no hall or entrance place to the cottage, and the staircase ascended out of the room itself. Whilst she was

absent, I looked round. It was a quaint homely, refined little place—the sort of place that appealed strongly to me, accustomed as I was to my own stately and less "homey" home.

Mr. Douglas soon appeared and greeted me warmly. His sister did not return at once, and we rapidly glided into the subject of books.

"I have been thinking of nothing else but all you told me two days ago," I began eagerly. "And one thing I want to ask you, while I think of it is this: you mentioned the breviary and the Divine Office as being something very precious to you. Is it a book that I might be allowed to see?"

He smiled.

"Yes, indeed, if you care to. But I have only my own copy which is in constant use, so I could not let you take it away. Are you a Latinist, Miss Lambert?"

"I was once. Now, I don't know. Besides your Latin would be different to mine, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it would, rather. Our's is not the strictly classical. You see, with us, Latin is a living language which is used colloquially, and for correspondence and for all sorts of chronicling. And when a tongue has been treated like that for many centuries, it is sure to depart from its ancient classical form. Wait a minute, though. Surely, I have got an old breviary in English."

He rose and went to a little black oak book-case on one side of the fire-place.

"Yes, here it is," he said, after a few minutes' search. "I got it, quite twelve years ago, on a second-hand bookstall, in my student days. I

thought it might be useful for occasional reference concerning some specially obscure passage of Latin. But I have never used it and never shall. You are most welcome to it, Miss Lambert."

I felt myself turning quite hot with pleasure, partly with delight at the speedy granting of my desire to study the breviary first-hand, and partly at the cordial way in which he clearly meant to present me with the book.

"It is truly kind of you. And what luck to find someone with the English form!" I exclaimed, gratefully. "How long may I keep it? You will promise to ask me for it, when you want it, won't you?"

"If you will keep it always, Miss Lambert, and sometimes say a prayer for me, out of it, I shall be for ever in your debt."

His reply astounded me.

"I say a prayer—for you," I gasped. "I should never presume to do such a thing."

Instead of being shocked, he burst out laughing. Until then, I had not realised that he could ever laugh heartily.

"Forgive me. It is very rude. But do explain what you would never presume to do—to say a prayer at all, or to say a prayer for me?"

"Partly both," I answered, with my head in a whirl. "I don't think I have said any prayers at all, since I left school. Prayer is speaking to God, surely? Well, how can I speak to anyone I don't know. And for you, *you*. Think of the cheek of it from such as I. And out of the breviary too."

He laughed no more. Instead, he stood looking down at me with wise kind eyes.

"Try it, Miss Lambert," he said at last. "Anyway, open the breviary every morning, haphazard, if you like and see what it says to you.

"Oh, is it that kind of book?" I said eagerly. "Like those tear-off calendars for every day from the poets, which make you think they tell you what kind of events the day is going to bring?"

He smiled.

"Yes. Something like that," he assented, picking up his own breviary from the sideboard. "I think one may safely say that no one can handle the Office without getting a daily message and a daily prophecy."

"Then I shall certainly read it," I exclaimed. "I am profoundly superstitious, and I love dabbling in the future. What is to-day's Office?"

"To-day? May 7, St. Stanislaus. That would be from the Common Office of a Martyr and Bishop in Paschal tide. I fear you will find it intricate, Miss Lambert, if you are really going in for following the Ordo Recitandi, daily."

He took the book from me, turned the pages and then handed it back. I read the first antiphon for Lauds.

"Thy saints, O Lord, shall grow as the lily, alleluia."

The words, of course, recalled Mr. Douglas's, as spoken the day when he told me his life's ambition. I glanced at him, with silent sympathy.

"Now, let me open it for myself, just anyhow, and see what will come," I said eagerly, closing the volume.

Then I opened it again and these words were the first to catch my attention. I read them and, as I

read, the vision of my white and gold orchard rose before me.

"I behold the field of the Church, that the same is a fruitful field, somewhile smiling with the brightness of virginity, somewhile golden with the ripe harvest of widowhood, somewhile rich with the crop of marriage. These things be diverse but they be fruits of the same field."

I stood, silent for a minute. I did not, then, understand clearly what I read, but there was the vague, bright word-picture.

"What a delicious book," I exclaimed at last. "It's prose poetry. 'For Holy Women.' You don't mean to say you have women in the breviary!"

Again, he smiled.

"Numbers of them, Miss Lambert. We priests, you see, are passionate admirers and champions of your sex and cause."

I closed the book at the sound of Miss Douglas's footstep on the stair. My action was instinctive, rather than reasoning.

But her brother appeared relieved by it.

At her appearance, the conversation became general, and I did not stay half an hour. I felt a mad desire to be alone with my new treasure.

I got back to my quiet room at teatime. During tea, my treasure lay unopened in the middle of the table. But, directly Susan had departed with the tray, I whisked the easy-chair into the sunny window, sat down and opened the book for a long long read. I say "book," but, as a matter of fact, it is in four volumes. I chose the one numbered "Spring ii." and, straightway, wandered off into a wonder world.

It is very, very difficult to describe any definite, conscious sensations. My feelings were mostly chaotic. Glimpses of a spiritual fairyland, glowing with magic, a dream of fair women clothed with everlasting light, a vision of brave men, gallant knights, mighty rulers opened out before me. Some were robed in red, some in violet, others in green: here, a stately Pope, crowned by gold tiara, stood beside a delicate virgin, clothed in snowy white: there a youthful martyr, with blood-stained vesture, bore his palm triumphant through the throng of maidens garlanded with roses and carrying great virgin-lilies in hands as white. The procession was endless, as it passed into a gold-bright city, through a gate of pearl, set in walls which glowed with the purple of amethyst, the green of emerald, and the blue of sapphire.

This was the "Common of Saints."

Then a stately temple rose before me, white as ivory, and shining with a silvery lustre which enhanced the whiteness. Not one speck of colour marred the virgin purity of the whole: it was like the dazzling, ice-crowned peaks of snow mountains glittering under the midnight moon. In its radiant sanctuary paved with crystal, a woman stood, crowned with stars, clothed in shimmering robes whiter and brighter than the sun, while all around her, and in and out among the marble pillars, countless other white-robed women glided.

This was the Office of the Virgin, with her attendant virgins, the vision of spotless womanhood.

Then came a dark, endless wood of quivering olives under whose shadow, One Figure stood alone,

alone, alone. It was blackest midnight—and yet a strange, subdued glow gave light enough to show the Figure and the slight shivering movement of the olives above It, as they turned sometimes their dark, sometimes their silvery-green sides to the murk of the sky. And far on, through the wood, distant flashes of lightning unveiled a low black hill, with three crosses on it.

This was the Office of the Passion and of Holy Week.

Last, a golden dawn—all things gold, gold, gold: a golden sky reflected in a glittering golden sea, gold buttercups carpeting the meadows, gold daffodils thick among the green-gold grass, . . . gold everywhere.

This was the Office of Paschal tide.

For three hours, I pored, entranced. The appearance of Mrs. Pearn with supper seemed far more unreal than my glorious wonder worlds. At once, I resumed my studies, this time among the "hours," the unvarying parts of the Office which are all from Scripture and, mostly, from the psalms. There other visions came to me of a Good Shepherd seeking a lost lamb on a dusky moorland, a Father carrying a tired child in tireless arms, a mother clasping an infant to her heart, a brother cherishing his sister, friend walking, hand in hand, with friend: and again and again, the image of great wings, under whose covert all might shelter. This was my last conscious thought, after getting into bed. I seemed to nestle against a living side wherein throbbed a mighty heart and to be covered, safe and warm, with soft protecting wings, under whose feathers I fell fast asleep at last.

CHAPTER IX

A LEADEN WORLD

NEXT day, I had a shock of disillusionment. Miss Douglas called on me, somewhat to my surprise. She, however, explained the reason for such a prompt return of civility, by saying that her brother had gone to Seaford for the day, which meant some free time for her.

"He must be a great tie to you," I began, hesitatingly. The subject was a delicate one. But I quickly found that hers was a nature on whom delicacy was wasted. "And I do admire your devotion to him," I added, awkwardly.

"Don't, then!" she blazed. "I loathe people who say that to me. My service is an entirely unwilling one. If I could, I should leave him, should never have lived with him at all. Don't waste admiration at my sisterly devotion, for it is only a delusion, like all other visions."

I stared, aghast at the storm I had raised. At my first sight of her, she had suggested a volcanic character with only a thin crust of self-restraint between it and the outer world. But I had never expected to see such an eruption as this.

"You are shocked, of course, Miss Lambert," she continued with a mocking smile. "But I would

rather shock you than deceive you. If you are going to be friendly with us, as you evidently intend to be, it mustn't be on false pretences. I wonder if you would do for any brother of yours what I have to do for mine, and in our particular circumstances too? We are too poor to live apart, or to live anywhere but here. If I were to leave him, he would have to pay a lot for service—such trained service as his state requires. Our means wouldn't allow of this. Of course, I might work. But, then, I have never been educated for any work which would ensure a good income. I was only eighteen when my brother came home, helpless. The situation was forced on me and there has never been any alternative to it. No doubt I might get a situation as nursery governess or companion, but such things are poorly paid and very often, wretched. The whole of our income, if I made it over to Percivale, wouldn't be sufficient for him if he had to pay for all the attention he requires. And even if it were, it isn't as if either his condition or mine would be happier. At least, we are together now, and I am mistress of our tiny home. But I can't say, truly, that I have ever been free to choose my life. It has never been anything more than a choice between one or two positions both of which it was not possible to refuse."

I listened, not knowing what to say.

"But blood is thicker than water," I faltered, at last. "And no doubt you love each other."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"How can the north pole love the south? We are too far apart. We haven't one idea in common,

not one. It seems to me that fate delights in pairing lives which have nothing in common, in forcing square pegs into round holes. My brother, for one thing, is, of course, deeply religious. I am not. I hate the sound of the word. I try not to show it more than I can help. And he tries not to show his faith, more than he can help. That's not a free and happy state of existence."

"To-day," she resumed, after a short pause, "he has gone over to Seaford to what he calls confession. He always does that after one of his moods. He gets fits of frightful depression, and that makes him irritable as the wind up. Whatever one does or leaves undone is wrong. I don't wonder at it, of course. I often wonder he doesn't do away with himself. But I can't help thinking if I believed all he does, I should be different. For one thing, I should consider my sister more than to give way. It never seems to me that he realises what I am giving up for him. My whole life, the best part of my womanhood, everything. He has certain helps and comforts. I have absolutely nothing. What chance have I of ever marrying? No man ever comes to such a place as this. And if he did, he would be afraid of any woman saddled with such a burden. But this isn't a cheerful conversation, Miss Lambert, and I beg your pardon. Only I don't want you to take things at a false valuation. Is that your typewriter? May I look? I have never seen one before. Do show me how you work it."

I complied, mechanically. My mind was in a whirl, my heart aching horribly at the hopeless misery, the sordid details, just confided to me.

"How quick it is!" she exclaimed, after watching me for a few minutes. "And I should think it is less tiring than writing. It is a much freer position, and you use all your fingers and both hands. Do you write shorthand as well?"

"Yes."

"It would be nice if Percivale had a machine," she said, musingly. "I believe, when once his hand was lifted into position, if his elbow and forearm could be supported on a rest, that his fingers would be strong enough just to compress the keys. And the exercise would be good for them."

"I will get him to try, if you like, next time he comes here," I said eagerly. "But what would he want with a machine regularly? Is he a writer? Mr. Randal told me of some book he is doing now."

"That is the first he has ever attempted, and may probably be the last. I don't think he has any original talent. This is only a translation. He is working very hard at it, and wants to get it done this month, if possible."

Another idea occurred to me.

"If that is so, I wish he would let me help him," I exclaimed. "Translation is very slow work. You have to keep stopping in the writing part to read and consult dictionaries. If he would dictate to me and let me take it down in shorthand, it would be done in a fourth of the time. Then I could type it for him in the evenings, and copy what he has already written by hand, so as to make a complete typewritten MS. I don't know if he has arranged anything with a publisher. If not, I might, mind it is

only might, because my work is all fiction, but I might be able to give him some hints or an introduction."

Her hard bright eyes softened amazingly.

"How generous of you, Miss Lambert. He would be delighted—only he would hesitate so much at taking your time."

"He needn't have any scruples of that kind. If it would make him happy, we would limit the dictation to a certain time a day; and I would promise, too, to type only a certain time. He couldn't mind then, could he?"

"No, I should think not. But you are indeed kind."

"Ask him about it to-night, and let us see what he says, then."

There must have been, unknown to me, an air of dismissal about this remark, for she took leave, hastily, and departed, thanking me to the end.

I was not sorry, for I was feeling simply idiotic. The violent transition from my recent visions back to the sordid world of reality was as distressing as a fall out of bed during a delicious dream.

After a bit, I set out to the ruins. I had ceased to visit them, since knowing that Mr. Douglas did so. For one thing, I did not wish to invade his only quiet oratory; for another, I had no taste for trysts. But that afternoon, I knew I was safe, because he was at Seaford for the day.

I reached the quiet, sad spot and sat down to try and rearrange my ideas.

Was this saint, mystic, seer indeed only a common man with a tendency to fits of gloom and depression,

and one who was accepting the sacrifice of a woman's life, without due gratitude? It seemed impossible. And yet his sister's words were impossible to doubt. Moreover, I remembered his remark to me about asking his sister if he were a saint. Clearly, he must have been conscious of shortcomings or he would not have said such a thing. After all, wasn't it all best explained by the fact that there was no God, that the whole of his life was delusion? His condition was pitiful enough, though, from his point of view, it was to some extent explicable, read in the light of mysticism. But here was another life, and a woman's, without one ray of light on it, that anyone could see: a life more wasted, far, than his. How could God allow such things?

So my mind worked and recoiled, almost with loathing, from my vision of the day before. The jar was intolerable.

In looking back upon my thoughts of that afternoon, I can only see one point in myself which does not fill me with disgust. And that is that I never, thank heaven, once doubted his absolute *sincerity*. At my worst, I believed he was in earnest. I believed that he believed. At my worst, I only set him down as a fanatic, under a delusion.

Then, as I sat there, misjudging, suddenly the sound of a footstep interrupted my thoughts, and in another minute, Percivale himself stood before me.

I jumped up, angry, and confused.

"Oh, I thought you were safe at Seaford. I shouldn't have come here, otherwise. Miss Douglas has been to see me and she said you were away for the day." I blurted out, as he greeted me with his

usual gentle kindness. But, in the midst of my annoyance, I had time to notice how dead tired he looked.

"I have returned earlier than I expected. But please, please, Miss Lambert, don't feel intrusive. The ruins are as much yours as they are mine. I have no sort of right to drive you from a pet haunt. Indeed, if you wish to come here, often, you have only to say so, and I shall not, of course, intrude."

His delicate consideration in giving up his one quiet retreat to a young woman's fancy, touched me deeply.

"I shouldn't think of such a thing. I know you like to say your Office here."

"By the way, what do you think of the breviary?" He interposed, with a slight smile.

"It's lovely, exquisite. Far too lovely and too exquisite for mere human beings and common daily life. I don't think I shall open it any more," I answered, disgusted to find that my voice was trembling.

His face fell and he came a little nearer.

"Miss Lambert, I hope nothing has disturbed you."

He paused and reflected. It seemed to me that, in those few seconds, he realised everything. But, of course, I may have been mistaken.

"It is a vast mistake to keep either religion or love in a plane apart from daily life," he said, gently. "They are both meant for hard, rough wear, for every circumstance and condition of life, spiritual and material. Often, our lives seem sordid. Often, the spiritual is entirely shut out. Our lower nature

is temporarily supreme. But that is the very time when we most need the spiritual, when we should cling to it most resolutely. It will marvellously adapt itself to our weakness. And we must remember that the saints—nay, that God Himself—experienced personally, the unloveliest material details of our common earthly life."

I listened, soothed in spite of myself.

"I think I can partly guess what has upset you," he continued, looking keenly at my self-conscious face. "My poor sister is very dissatisfied and doesn't hesitate to express her views, even to new acquaintances. I agree with you that it is very sad, that her life is a supremely sad one. And I am sure you will believe me when I say it weighs on me, as it never can weigh upon any outsider. I would give my life to make her happy. And what is more, I do give my *daily* life. It is easy to die for a person. It is difficult to live for them. Often, of course, I fail. I am, alas! only human and imperfect. Often, I try her sorely, I know. But it is never wilful. Sometimes, it is not even conscious. And I trust in God to make up to her for all she suffers for and with me."

His meekness broke me down. I turned away, to hide a rush of tears.

"Remember what I said the other day. We have yet to see the end. She is God's . . . all His. He will care for her, does care for her. Meantime, we can only live by faith. Sight will come at last. Weeping may endure for the night: joy cometh in the morning."

His quiet words arrested my tears and gave me back my peace of mind.

What an unreasonable, hysterical, idiotic, preposterous young fool I had been, I reflected.

Sure of myself at last, I turned to him and took his helpless hand between both of mine.

"Thank you. If I dared, I would say God bless you. I see now what an idiot I have been. No, I am not going to stay another minute. You are dead tired, and you want to say your Office and go home to tea. Your sister has a message for you from me, and remember that the answer is to be an unconditional 'Yes,' or I shall never speak to you again."

And then I fled home.

If I had only known it at the time, he had written this passage in his "confessions," the previous night. He always dated his entries, so that I can now compare them with my own diary of the time. And the day of our rash judgment, his sister's and mine, this is what he had written.

"*May* 7.—Lord, a difficult point is settled at last. Hitherto, Thou knowest that my standard, in dealing with others, has been 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' But now, this has failed. And I think it has failed because it is not the highest, not the *divine*. In future, I must take the divine: the standard which, if Thou hadst not commanded it, would seem too wildly impossible. Henceforward, I must love others, *as Thou hast loved me*—with a love no less than that. Often, in dealing with a certain difficult, troubled, unloving soul, I have wondered how far to correct, chide, or to show displeasure. Now I know that I ought not to show it at all. Thou showest me clearly now, that love is the only way. In looking back upon all my own storms of soul, I see that if Thou hadst once shown displeasure or disapproval,

Thou wouldst have lost me. Nothing but Thy humility with me could so completely have humbled me. Nothing but Thy patience could have conquered my impatience. Nothing but the overlooking of my faults, the tender encouragement which Thou always gavest, could have given me courage to set out along Thy narrow way. Help me, now, to be to others what Thou hast been to me.

"In future, when people are unkind, inconsiderate, ungrateful, I will say secretly 'More than this, O patient Lord, hast Thou borne *from me*. I have been far ruder, harsher, unkinder than this to Thee.

"Help me, in deed and word and in truth, to love others as Thou hast loved me."

CHAPTER X

LOVE'S ENIGMAS

THE morning brought me one of the most grateful letters I have ever received in my life. It was from Mr. Douglas, thankfully accepting my offer, upon the condition that I should tell him at once, if I found the task too great. He was, evidently, anxious to begin at once, and ended by asking what my wishes were as to details.

I decided to go to him, at some time convenient to him and his sister. It was nothing to me to carry up my light shorthand notebook every day to the cottage, whereas if he came to me, it would involve the bringing backwards and forwards, of the book itself, a dictionary, and, probably, notes, too.

His letter had been delivered by a child from the farm on her way to school. There was no means of sending an answer unless I went myself, and this I did not like to do, at an early hour in the morning. Miss Douglas would be steeped in household duties and, very properly, inhospitable. So I decided, for once, to catch Percivale himself in the ruins.

I succeeded. It was not ten minutes before I heard his footstep.

And my heart gave a great bound of delight as I saw how his face lighted up at the sight of me.

"I have come here, maliciously, deliberately, to meet you, to frivol away your time, to postpone your Office, and to do all the other wicked things I can think of," I laughed, shaking hands. "I was a silly child yesterday. To-day, I am a wicked one. Which kind do you prefer?"

"A wicked one," he replied, promptly. "Like many other people, I can do with a knave, never with a fool. But, Miss Lambert, you are teaching me to be very ungallant. You are tempting me to agree that you are either silly or wicked, when you know quite well that you are neither."

"Indeed, I know nothing of the sort. But what I came to know was, will it suit you if I come to you every day? And, if so, would two hours after tea, say from five o'clock until seven, be a good time?"

"Excellent," he replied, with warmth. "It so happens that my sister is usually out gardening in the early evening, so we should not disturb her. And all household duties are done long before tea-time."

"Good. Then I will appear to-night punctually at five o'clock. No, don't thank me. Remember that it is I who am for ever in your debt. And, moreover, it is extremely good for me to have some shorthand practice. I use it, you see, almost entirely for my own thoughts, and unconsciously go my own pace. This sort of thing ruins one for taking down speeches. I have probably got very slow. So you must be patient with me at first. And then, I

expect your book is probably very technical with all sorts of strange terms and phrases. Now, I must go, because you want to say your Office."

"And what about *your* breviary?" he pleaded. "Are you reconciled to it again?"

"Yes, yes, yes. You quite restored my peace of mind last evening. But oh! there are such heaps more impertinent prying questions I want to ask! Don't tempt me or I shall fall."

"But I shall hold you to our agreement," he insisted, seating himself on our usual pile of stones. "Sit down, Miss Lambert, and pry."

I complied gladly. And then, shyness seized me to such an extent that I felt entirely deprived of speech.

"It's so difficult to put into words," I groaned at last. "But do you remember saying, yesterday, that religion and love were meant for hard wear? And you remember that other day, when you told me your definition of a priest, and your ideal of the mystical life?"

"Yes."

"Well, the more I think over it, the more it seems to me that you only told me your side of it all. I mean—oh, how shall I explain?"

He made no effort whatever to help me. He simply sat, silent, expectant, and, obviously, much interested.

"Perhaps this is the clearest explanation. It seems to me that you told me all about how you love God. But you didn't speak of His side of it. You didn't say if you think He loves you."

My unfortunate victim stared up at me with the

most genuine expression of amazement I have ever seen upon any face.

"But isn't that all included, understood, the keynote of the whole?"

"No, indeed it isn't—not to a dull mind like mine," I cried, fluency returning with a rush, upon the discovery that he neither misunderstood nor resented my crude questionings. "I can imagine that a person might love God, in the dark, so to speak . . . without knowing, perhaps without even caring, whether the love were returned."

Mr. Douglas took off his hat, and passed his hand slowly across his forehead. It was a funny trick of his, when thinking deeply. Then he sat silent for so long that I got frightened again.

"You are angry with me?" I faltered, laying a trembling finger on his helpless right hand. "And you don't like to say so, after all."

"No, no," he cried, so feelingly, that I quite jumped. "On the contrary, I am more grateful to you than ever. With the unconsciousness of a child, you have raised one of the profoundest points in the whole mystical life. And, strangely enough, I have never asked myself the question, point blank, before."

"Well, ask yourself now and tell me the answer," I said, boldly.

"I don't know that I can—entirely," he said, slowly. "As for your first question, yes, of course, I am certain God loves me, far, far more certain of that than I am that I love Him."

I gasped.

"But as for the other problem—the abstract one

which one tries to make concrete. I don't know. I don't indeed."

"Do explain," I moaned. "Do remember that I can't understand words of more than one syllable."

He flashed a curious glance at me. "Can't you, Miss Lambert? In the end, I shan't be surprised if you are teaching me."

Again I gasped.

"It is always a disputed point among mystics: the point whether it is more perfect to love, as you say, in the dark, without desire of reward, without even knowing if our love is returned, to love God purely for what He is in Himself, without reference to personal considerations or benefits. Or whether the love which *desires* is the greater, the love which craves for love in return."

I clapped my hands, with delight. "Oh, this is glorious! That is a question which I do understand, which I can answer—at any rate for myself. Let me think three minutes. Of course, I shouldn't dare to think about myself and God, as you do. But, by putting a man, a human lover in God's place, I can answer it most clearly. Promise you will answer too and let's compare them."

We sat in silence, for quite five minutes. Then the woman, of course, spoke first.

"I am ready. Shall I begin? Well, if I loved a man, I should never rest until I had made him love me, somehow, and made him say so. I could never be satisfied to love in the dark. His love would be so much more to me than mine for him, that mine would almost pale beside his. I mean, if I were sure he loved me, I should scarcely care whether I

loved him or not. I should love loving him, of course, should love being his. But it would only be half as important as being loved by him, as having him for mine. I should feel that all sorts of evils might befall me as long as I only loved him. But I should feel nothing mattered, that nothing could hurt me, when once I was sure that he loved me. I suppose mine is a horribly greedy and grasping sort of love. But that's the way I shall love—when I do."

"And when you do," he said in a low tone, "God grant your lover may be all that, and more, than you desire. No, Miss Lambert, your mode is not greedy. It would be, if you desired your lover's gifts, rather than himself. As it is, you have expressed the highest—what, in scholastic language, we should call desire for union with the beloved. The soul that desires union expresses the highest love of which it is capable. It is the same thought as the one which the great St. Thomas Aquinas expressed, when asked by God what reward he would choose from Him. All St. Thomas's utterances are immortal: but even he never made a greater one than that 'Non aliam nisi Te, Domine,' 'None other, O Lord, than Thyself.'"

"It does seem easy," I said, with a choke. "Easy, that is, if one could only believe, to start with. Now tell me yours."

"Mine is the same," he said, with a smile. "I have never asked myself the question before. But it is."

For a time, we were silent. Words seemed impertinent and unnecessary. Then, I was again the first to speak.

"Let's see how it works the other way round," I said, slowly. "I mean, from the lover's point of view. If I had a lover, would he care more to be loved in the dark, or the other way? Would he be more anxious to receive my love, than to give his to me? Why, of course, he would. It is easier still when you look at it from his point of view. That is the lover's one vast anxiety—lest his lady shouldn't love him. He loves her with all his heart, but that is as nothing compared to the problem whether she loves him."

Again there was silence. And, this time, I did not ask him for his answer. I dared not, simply. He was so absorbed, entranced, that he did not even notice it, when I got up very quietly and glided away out of the ruins.

I came home and scribbled down the conversation, word for word, in my diary. And when I had done, I was just one huge ache of longing for a lover who would love me in my way and who would make me love him in return.

That afternoon, we duly began the book. It took only a fortnight to complete it, though, to get it finished in this time, and to copy up the back part, I worked pretty hard, and put my own writing aside entirely. I could see that it was a matter of immense importance to Mr. Douglas. He was almost painfully anxious to get it accepted. Sometimes, it seemed to me that there must be some graver reason for his anxiety than the desire to spread an unquestionably beautiful work on the mystical life.

When it was finished, I was confronted by one of the strongest temptations of my life.

The evening before, I had been instructing him about a likely publisher, telling him what to say in his letter, and also promising an introduction from myself, for all of which he was, as usual, immensely grateful. But, when I rose to leave, he made this significant remark:

"The acceptance of this book is more than a matter of life and death to me. It is my whole life, here and hereafter."

I went away, puzzled and a trifle pained. It seemed to me that a passing, temporal thing ought not to be made a matter upon which should hang eternal issues. Yet, on the other hand, I did not know what was in his mind about it. Possibly, some tremendous decision was being weighed: some decision so great that human mind could not balance it, and he had therefore decided to await a sign from Heaven which should be, altogether, out of his own power to control.

I went home and fought a great battle with myself. Whether or not I approved the method, whether or not it was my business to judge at all, one thing was clear. Rightly or wrongly, the fate of the book was a huge matter to him. And, of course, it was equally clear that he wanted it accepted.

I thought and thought and thought.

I knew the publisher. And I knew myself to be a rich young woman. I had only to write a private letter, offering to defray expense of publication, and the matter was settled. If the truth leaked out in the end, it would not matter. But there was no reason why it should leak out.

It was a bitter struggle. I had always pitied

unsuccessful authors more than any other class on earth. I myself had always been so successful. Speaking from the financial standpoint, it didn't matter an atom to me if my MSS. were taken or not, so I always felt that my luck was unjust. And here was an author whom I pitied as I had never pitied anyone in the world before.

I even began the letter. I could not decide against it. My mind was a whirlpool of emotions. Reason seemed to have deserted me, and I could only decide by feelings.

Then, suddenly, judgment returned. The doubts fled away before this one overruling thought: "If Mr. Douglas knew what you were doing, would he approve? If it is indeed so important a matter to him, would he like you or anyone to force a decision at the very outset, to destroy all chance of a free opinion?"

This decided me. I tore up the half-finished letter and wrote the one originally contemplated.

But I went to bed, that night, with an oppressive sense on me, of coming disaster.

CHAPTER XI

A SOUL IN THE BALANCE

My worst fears—worse than my worst fears—were realised. The manuscript was refused. And its refusal led to such a crisis, such a vision of a naked soul standing, consciously, on the brink of an awful precipice that my life has never been quite the same since. I changed, developed rather, from a child to a woman that day. The fate of his book wrought a lasting effect not only in Percivale's soul, but in mine as well.

The news was communicated to me in a letter from the publisher, replying to my introduction. He thanked me for my recommendation, and assured me, regretfully, that the book, though good in itself for a certain limited public, was not the kind of work suitable for publication by his house. He made no delay in sending his decision.

This was all, then, that my recommendation had achieved—a refusal and a singularly prompt one. Mr. Thompson had settled our fate within a week.

I laid down his letter and tried to arrange my thoughts. Of course, they were all of Percivale, and they were all darkened by black fear. I recalled his

words about the vast importance of an acceptance, and half unconsciously, I trembled lest this beautiful soul should be tried beyond its strength and should, after all, come forth from the fire, not gold, but dross.

At first, I dreaded to meet him. Then that feeling was driven out by an overpowering desire to get to him, at once, without a minute's delay. Suddenly, his helplessness, his loneliness, rose before me and struck down fear. I flew for my hat and hurried to the ruins. He would be certain to wait for me there, guessing that I had also heard from Mr. Thompson by the same post.

It was a glorious morning in late May. But the warm sunshine and the happy birds seemed mockery.

I ran into the ruins. Yes, he was there, awaiting me.

Directly I saw his face, I knew that my worst fears were far short of the reality of the danger. All the patience had fled and, in its place, a frozen despair reigned. He did not look angry, even then. It was simply hopelessness, despair. He was sitting on the usual heap of stones and his face, his expression, the dead-white hand, the whole attitude of his figure almost broke my heart as I looked. I did not know what I was doing. Or rather, I knew, but I did not reason or choose. I simply followed my instincts, regardless of any other consideration.

As I entered through the broken wall, he turned to me, but made no effort to rise. This omission told me, more than far greater things would have, how utterly "done" he was.

I ran across to him, sat close beside him, and took the inert hand between mine. He didn't speak, and made no answering sign of greeting.

"You poor thing, I know a little what you feel. It's your first book and your first refusal. No one but an author can know what that is. It can only come once in a lifetime, thank goodness, and, in time, we get quite hardened. But there is no suffering to equal the first rejection. The world itself seems to have come to an end."

I talked on like this, for quite a long time. Then he roused himself and spoke.

"Thank you, Miss Lambert. You are always kind, too kind. I don't deserve it. This is no ordinary refusal. As I told you, it was more than life to me."

"You didn't tell me," I said, clutching at any straw. If I could only make him speak, make him angry, make him rage, anything would be preferable to this frozen despair. "You told me it was, as you say, a matter of more than life. But you didn't tell me why. Tell me now. Tell me at once. I insist on knowing."

He didn't resent it. Instead, he obeyed unhesitatingly.

"I haven't told you, have never told anyone, not even the priest in confession, what the aim of my life *really* is. All that I said to you that first day was, of course, true, but it was only part of the whole. I have one supreme ambition, one certainty. Can't you guess?"

I shook my head.

"I have guarded my secret well then, even in

speaking so openly to anyone as I have to you. Well, my ambition is to restore the old Faith to Blackcombe, to raise up a place in which the Infinite Sacrifice can once more be offered, for God's sake and the people's."

I stared, petrified. How dense I had been! Of course, I now remembered that he had said, how before his accident, he had believed this to be the very *raison d'être* of his existence. But, somehow, it had seemed no longer possible. I listened, breathlessly.

"According to the laws of our Church, Mass cannot be offered in England, in any place not reserved exclusively for this sacred purpose. In Ireland, for instance, an ordinary priest can say Mass, by permission of the Bishop, in an ordinary room. In England, no. Only a dignitary with what is called 'the portable altar faculty' can do this. Consequently, you see, with our limited accommodation, our tiny three-roomed cottage, it was not possible to set aside a room for an oratory. I needn't tell you that we are very, very poor," he continued. "I could not save even a few shillings a month because of my sister. If I chose to stint myself, I couldn't stint her. Then, at last, it occurred to me to translate and try to sell this book for £50. With £40 I can get a little iron room, fitted as a plain little chapel. We have a small plot of garden behind our cottage upon which it could stand. The £40, or £45 at the outside, would clear all expenses, including carriage here, the concrete foundation, and the erection. And then, you see, there would have been the *possibility*

of Mass. Various old college friends of mine would come, from time to time, and offer Mass here for me, gladly, without a fee. And for one Mass, my life, the whole thing would have been worth while.

"Of course," he continued, after a pause, "I had many dreams, many castles in the air. To get back and restore these ruins was one. But that can never be, even apart from the question of money. For long, it and the surrounding land have lapsed to the manor and been common property, beyond the possibility of purchase. You can't buy common land—luckily. If once the principle were admitted, there would be no end to it, no public property left in England for the people. But that is, after all, only a detail. The essential is to offer up the Sacrifice once more, in Blackcombe, no matter where. And my oratory would have been within sight and sound of these ruins. Now, I feel that it is all over. I knew, months ago, that I can endure no more. I have come to the end. That translation was my last supreme effort. I told God so. But I have failed, it has failed, all of it. From beginning to end, I have been wrong. It was presumption ever to have believed that I was called to do a great work for God. This delusion has been my ruin throughout. I was wrong to get ordained. God has shown me plainly enough, that I have been presumptuously displeasing to Him. From first to last, He has consistently refused my offering. And when I persisted, He had to resort to severe measures. He rejected my priesthood. Now, He has rejected my whole life's work. It serves me right, no doubt. Only—when one is so willing, so anxious, tries so hard, is

utterly unconscious of wilful wrong or sin—I have often wondered how He can have the heart to treat one so. We are so small, so small, and so ignorant. He is so great and so wise."

He stopped at last, and then a miracle happened. All through his story, I had been torn by all possible emotions, pity, horror, fright, a sense of impotency, wild desires to promise him unlimited money, to remind him that there are other publishing firms in the world besides Thompson and Co., to offer to build the oratory, to publish the book at my own expense. And then, suddenly, all these vanished before a flash of light, a miracle, a revelation. I don't know what you call these things—or I didn't, then. No doubt they are common enough in the lives of saints. But, for one marvellous hour I, poor heathen Phyllis, was a believer, a lover, a saint—yes, a *priest.* It came to me, in a flood of heavenly light, that, humanly speaking, I must save this soul. I found myself believing in God, more, loving Him, at a time when I should, naturally, have felt most disgusted with Him. I felt that Heaven itself and the Heart of the Eternal lay open before me. I knew what it was to be a priest, to fight, on God's side, for a priceless soul. And I knew that the battle must be fought and won on supernatural ground only. He must surrender to God alone, for God's sake alone.

"Yes, He is, He is," I agreed, slipping down on my knees, and wriggling closer to his side. "He *is* great and wise. And we are small, small ignorant children. Remember all you have fought through, suffered for Him. Think of all the privation, the

loneliness, the absence of all human support, more, the condemnation, the persecution you have constantly received. Think of the perpetual prayer you have offered, the 'constant anguish of patience,' the blind faith in God, the continual love of Him in face of all difficulties. Look back over your whole life, from the time when you first began again after your accident, and bravely re-consecrated yourself to Him. Think of that beautiful woman, Mary, the Star of the Sea. How she must have loved your white life. Ah, you men don't know, for all your wisdom, what a pure man is to any woman."

He turned to me, startled, and I saw, with a thrill of triumph, that the dull despair was fading from his face on which was dawning, instead, a look of hungry craving. I had struck the right chord.

"You can't doubt God's existence, nor hers. To do this, is to doubt your own. You don't doubt it. You never have. You believe that they both exist. Very well. Then, as I say, think what your white, white life has been, is, to her. I am a woman. I know, if you don't. Remember the temptations you had at the beginning to throw it all up, and indulge in unlawful things. You didn't fall. You kept yourself as white as snow for her sake and God's. You have, ever since. That point alone mind, avowed, deliberate purity, especially in a man, would alone make them love you beyond words. It makes even me love you."

He turned to me again, this time, with a faint tinge of colour suffusing his white face. But it wasn't annoyance or embarrassment. He didn't for one instant, misunderstand me. It was reviving hope and her twin sister, joy.

"And if I love you, how much more must they, they who understand the whole, as no mortal can? Think of all the other beauties of your life, besides this one. Do you mean to tell me seriously that you believe anyone, even a blind, cruel, human being could mock at it and despise it? Even in itself, just looked at by an outsider, your whole life is exquisite. Remember what it has been to me, though I can't properly understand half of it. And, then, it is not being offered to me, or for my sake, any of it. If it were—just imagine what I should feel, how I should cherish it, guard it, brood over it day and night, and how I should grieve to see it come to harm or fail. Think what I should feel if I saw you fail me, mistrust me, throw down your glorious stainless shield just because you didn't understand something that I had done. Again, what's the good of a service which isn't tried? What fair lady would care an atom for a knight who wouldn't fight for her, or face danger and privation for her? She would soon send him packing, and tell him that he wasn't worthy of her and didn't love her. And when your lady is—who she is: when your King is who He is—when you are *certain* of victory, because your cause is His, when you are *certain* that He loves you because, if there's a God at all, He is love . . . how can you doubt or hesitate? You shan't. You shan't disgrace yourself. You shan't give in. You'd better have died last night than this. I would sooner have killed you with my own right hand than see you fail. You don't know, I didn't know till now, what you and your life are to me. And if to me, how much, much more to God who owns you? You are

not mine. You never can be. And yet I would rather have seen you dead than a coward. You are God's. You always have been. Think, then, what your decision is to Him. You haven't given in, mind. It isn't too late. You were only hesitating. I don't wonder. Anyone would have, under the same conditions. You haven't spoilt it yet, or tarnished your shield in one single place. But it's time, now, to decide, to give in absolutely, to say, plump, that God knows best and you believe, in the dark, He still loves you and that this hard, hard trial is for the best."

I paused at last, in my mad torrent of words. There was a look on his face which told me that my work was done. I raised the poor white anointed hand to my lips, kissed it, and laid it gently down. Then rose to my feet and turned away. This finally roused him. He jumped up.

"Phyllis, don't go without a word of thanks from the most grateful of all your servants. You do indeed understand—better than I do, far, as I told you, you would one day. You have saved my soul to-day. You know it, you brave woman, you angel sent from heaven to comfort me. No one else would have dared to probe my heart's wound in order to heal it. And then you wonder that we worship womanhood and immortalise her in the Divine Office."

Before I could stop him or indeed even understand what he was going to do, he stooped low, raised the hem of my dress a few inches and kissed it.

"Don't, don't!" I cried, horror stricken. "Don't do those terrifying things and call me by such great fearful names. Call me Phyllis, always. Yes,

that indeed was right. And just let me be your small, ignorant but devoted sister. You shall be my big brother and scold me, when your turn comes. We will love each other honestly and faithfully, and scold whenever we like. Anything else would frighten me too much."

"Very well," he acquiesced meekly. "You are indeed good, brave Phyllis, to accept another brother, and such an unworthy one."

"Now you must go on doing exactly what I tell you," I interposed. "Sit down again and say your Office. And bring your sister to have tea with me this afternoon. I must really go. I have been here so long already."

I departed with this abruptness because I felt such a storm of tears brewing that I didn't know how much longer I could trust myself. Moreover, an idea had occurred to me which I wanted to carry out, unseen.

I raced to Pine Tree Cottage, found Miss Douglas, and confided boldly in her. She promised secrecy, thanked me warmly, and delivered the precious MS. into my eager hands.

I fled home with it, repacked it, and sent it, with a letter of explanation, to my own publishers. Then I waited at the gate, till the whistle of the late and leisurely postman announced his return journey to Seaford, and confided the parcel to him. Before his arrival, Susan had appeared twice, to announce with veiled reproach that my lunch was waiting. So it was afternoon, before I had time to think collectedly. Then, feeling absolutely done, I set off, with my diary to the orchard.

Queen May's reign was nearly over, and she was preparing for departure by scattering all her loveliest treasures recklessly about the world. Gold and white had yielded to mauve, beryl green and rose. I had seen the orchard vested successively in gold, white, purple, green and red. Black for the dead, it would never wear. Within its happy enclosure there was no such thing as death.

In the middle, stood a large apple tree without one speck of visible green or even white. It was simply a vision in delicate rose, as if the white petals were flushed with rapture at the kiss of their lover, the sun. Here and there, a few unopened buds glowed ruby red among the pink. Just behind it, was a half-opened beech, glowing with that vivid incomparable beech green which is more than half gold. The grass at the farther end was sown thick with amethysts, where the wild hyacinths blossomed among the green. Overhead, a dainty white half-moon sailed down the turquoise sky across which the fork-tailed swallows shot to and fro. On the warm-scented breeze, came the call of many cuckoos. It was May, peerless, perfect, complete.

And then the tears came. They had considerably delayed until time and place were convenient. But they had to come at last, though, after all, they were not a storm. Their source lay too deep for storm. It is only once or twice in a lifetime that we fathom the depths of the heart's well-spring of tears. This was the first time that I had ever done so.

To this day, I don't clearly know exactly why I cried. Reaction, relief, pity, caused some of the tears, no doubt. But it was about myself, for my

own soul, that I wept the most. As I said before, no one could have passed through such an experience and remain unchanged . . . even if the objective view alone were considered. But what wrung my heart was that incredible hour which had been mine, with all it contained. I was left with no delusions on the subject. It was perfectly clear to me that the gift had been only lent, not given, and for Percivale's sake, not mine.

I felt like a soul who has been led up to the summit of a high mountain and shown the promised land, flowing with milk and honey . . . just shown, and then sent back to its humdrum life in the valley again, on the wrong side of the hills.

Yet, with the tears, came a subtle hope. It was almost as if their warm rain had caused this grain of hope to germinate. Surely, some day, for my own sake, God would let me believe and love at the last? The more I dwelt on this thought, the more quietly my tears flowed. Then, they ceased altogether, and my mind returned to Percivale. Would he, I wondered, be seized with remorse and blame himself unduly for his sore temptation? I pondered for a long time and then felt a conviction that his simplicity, humility and trust were all too deep to allow of needless introspection, scruples and self-reproach. My conviction was right, as I discovered long afterwards in the words of his "confession," written that evening.

"*May* 30.—Lord, how can I ever thank Thee for bringing me safely through such a day as this has been? And what are my feelings, now that it is over? I ought perhaps to feel shame and despair,

and remorse, and discouragement. But I feel nothing but love. Never on earth was a soul more unworthy of Thy love than mine. And, for that very reason, my trust in Thee is boundless. If I were good, a saint, perhaps I should need Thee less. Thou seest how sore my need is and that is why Thou never failest me. A human lover would fain be always united with his beloved, wherever she might be, or whatever she might be doing, whether playing or working, eating or sleeping, good or naughty. He would, if he loved truly, most desire to be with her when she was being tempted and, perhaps, giving way. The naughty child most sorely needs his father's love. The straying sheep most needs the care of the shepherd. So it is with me. Thou, more tender than any earthly lover, art nearest to me when I need Thee most, when I am sad, discouraged, falling. Never hast Thou been nearer to me, O tender, patient, unfailing Love, than Thou hast been to-day. Thou knowest how grieved I am to have so tried Thee. And yet how I rejoice at this fresh proof of Thy patience and forgiveness. Once more, I submit myself entirely to Thy will. Once more, I give back to Thee my priesthood, my life, myself, as Thy living victim."

Then follows a whole page of ecstatic praise of and for Phyllis. But poor Phyllis can't quote that page, because it was, none of it, due to her or performed by her own unaided power. Nevertheless, I will confess that, to me, it is the most precious page of the whole book. And of course it is to Leo.

CHAPTER XII

PRAISE

By teatime, I had entirely regained my composure, though I still felt uncommonly nervous at the idea of meeting Mr. Douglas after the almost melodramatic scene of the morning. Probably, with his delicate man's insight, he realised my state of mind. At any rate, he put me at my ease directly.

His first greeting was to make apologies for his sister's inability to come. It was her weekly marketing day in Seaford, it seemed. Her absence explained, he then thanked me with perfect simplicity and deep feeling for what he called my "goodness" to him in the morning.

"I have had hours in which to think and pray," he said, with a smile. "And I realise that, in all the crises of my life, to-day's was the most fateful. You, Phyllis, compelled me to be true. But for you, I should have failed. No one else could have done the work for me . . . no man, no priest. I have accepted failure, and not merely theoretically but actually, practically, have said "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

I couldn't answer. It was all so pathetic, and

besides this, I was filled with a supreme pity for any man who owed salvation to a woman. In those days, I did not understand men's hearts—or my own—as I do now.

He divined my feeling, unexpressed though it was, and went on to comfort me.

"I am too truly man to feel it humiliating, this debt to a woman . . . and an outsider. In fact, I am proud to be beholden to womanhood. It's more natural, and probably, therefore more supernatural for the sexes to be dependent one upon the other. But that is more than enough of me to the end of my life. Let us talk of you. I do hope I didn't distress you, cost you too much? Are you in any way, suffering for my shortcomings?"

He spoke with a brotherly solicitude which almost upset me.

"Good gracious, no," I replied, impetuously. "I wouldn't have missed it for anything—now I know it has ended well for you. You call me an 'outsider,' and I am. But for that short hour—not quite one whole hour—I knew what it was to be a believer, a mystic, a priest. No, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Even if nothing more ever comes to me, it is worth it—a life of blankness for that one glorious, incredible hour. Of course, the experience has made life seem utterly empty and grey. But even if I am doomed to live evermore down in the dreary sunless valley, I have once seen the full splendour of celestial sunshine upon the, apparently, inaccessible heights. It's better to have seen and lost, than never to have seen at all—if you will forgive me such a liberty with Tennyson."

He didn't answer, and I was glad, for his silence said more than speech.

We sat, thus silent, for quite a long time. Then, as usual, I was the first to speak.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked, shyly.

"Do? I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"I mean, are you going on with your life just as usual, or are you going to sell the cottage and go?"

He laughed.

"I see you are sceptical as to my final perseverance, and no wonder. No, I shan't ever sell the cottage or go, of my own free will. This place is my destiny. If I have failed in my end, failed in accomplishing my main desire here, at least the other is left, the broken life, the broken vase of ointment pouring itself out humbly at the Master's feet."

"I wish I could understand exactly why you are so keen on praise," I said, reflectively. "I don't know anything about prayer, but I suppose there are lots of different kinds. But your idea seems to be thanksgiving."

"Not even thanksgiving, but praise," he amended, quickly.

I stared.

"What's the difference?"

"Thanksgiving is gratitude for favours received either by ourselves or others. Praise is less personal even than that. It is pure joy in God, pure delight in Him, without reference to His gifts. The grateful soul says "I thank Thee for all Thy goodness to me." The praising, adoring soul says "I love Thee: I love Thee better than all the world and better than all

Thy gifts." I fear it is impossible to explain. Praise, you see, is eternal. Other forms of prayer will cease with time. Thanksgiving will continue throughout eternity, but it is one degree lower than praise, because it is interested. Praise is the highest. And it is, in my best hours, unutterable consolation to me to feel that a life as maimed and useless as mine may anticipate its heavenly life and spend itself so exaltedly."

"I think I see. Now tell me, do you think that everyone is meant to be a mystic?"

His eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Come, be honest, Phyllis. Amend your question."

"Well then," I blurted out, blushing furiously, "do you think that I am meant to be a mystic, to pray, to thank God and praise Him?"

"Decidedly I do."

I stared, amazed. And a sudden gleam of sunshine pierced the chill grey mist. His answer, in some mysterious way, already made my life less blank.

"I don't know anything about prayer," I continued slowly. "I mean, well, I think undoubtedly I believe in God, somehow. But He is too far off, too mysterious for me to pretend I love Him, so I couldn't praise. And I couldn't ask for things, I don't think. When one really does believe, even vaguely, it seems waste of time. IF there's a God, He must, by the fact of His existence, do the best He can for you. And to bother Him for things in the dark, is too much like dictating to Him. Besides, one might ask for things which would be bad for one. No.

The only kind of prayer I could say would be thanksgiving for all that is already mine."

"Then you begin where many leave off. You begin high up."

"But I haven't begun," I interrupted, hastily. "I don't know any prayers of thanksgiving."

"Well, begin to-night, and make them up out of your own head."

So I did. At bedtime, I knelt by my open window, looking up into the unfathomable depths of the moonlitten sky—depths that were also heights. The heavens were like a waveless, tideless sea of indigo, spangled with star phosphorescence. Yet, up from this boundless ocean, here and there, soared mountains of dazzling clouds which reflected the moonlight from all their silvern peaks. First, I thanked God for that—for the sky, the moon, the stars, the clouds. Then, for myself, my happy life, my many gifts. But, finally, I found the intensest gratitude centring round Percivale and especially round the experience of the morning.

After a time, my wandering thoughts travelled to Susan, above all other people. I saw again, mentally, the scene between her and her lover in the farmyard. I reflected, blushing hotly in the shadow, upon my declaration of love to Percivale, in the stress of the interview in the ruins. And a great wonder possessed me as to whether this was really love.

If I had only known it, the mere fact of doubting or of wondering ought to have answered the question. But I was then too ignorant to realise this, and I half comforted myself at the remembrance of his own composure, his acceptance of my words as

if they were the most natural and proper on earth.

"He can't think I love him in the way I wonder about," I said vaguely and ungrammatically to the moon, as I rose from my knees at last. "I know he interests me more than anyone I ever met. And I am sure I love him better than I love anyone in the world. But, so far, I don't know anything more."

CHAPTER XIII

FRUITION

Two days later I heard from my publishers. The letter was, of course, an acceptance of Percivale's MS.—together with a cheque for £50.

This had been my idea on the day of the crisis in the ruins. Before the crisis, I had not dared to interfere. Afterwards, when he had heroically accepted failure, had lived consistently up to his ideal, I knew that human hand might arrange the rest. So I had written to Mr. Morgan, my special friend in the firm, promising to defray cost of publication, and asking for an acceptance and the cheque by return of post.

Of course I had known from that day, that the thing was certain. And yet, as I sat at breakfast that sunny morning in early June, staring at the cheque, the letter, and the agreement form awaiting Percivale's signature, the whole story assumed a concrete form—a form so beautiful that it almost frightened me.

I thought long of the broken, patient life whose aim was now accomplished—through me. It is an awful thing to play a prominent, in fact, *the* prominent part in any life drama—so awful that I waited long before I sought my friend in the ruins. This

hesitation amazed me; I had vividly pictured the scene, the morning of acceptance, and had mentally seen myself flying, as even I had never run before, with the precious papers in my hand. But now that the thing was reality, I found myself walking slowly, and yet more slowly as I neared the spot. It was so delicate, yet so tremendous a matter for a poor little heathen who did not half understand or believe the colossal mysteries which she was helping to bring about.

When I reached the chapel, Percivale had finished his Office, so long had I lingered.

He greeted me warmly, and as I held his helpless right hand and looked into his face, I felt and saw that his soul was utterly at peace.

I suppose he noticed at once that my manner was strange. If I looked anything like what I felt, "strange" is hardly the adjective to describe it.

"What is it, Phyllis?" he asked, his smile changing to a look of kind concern. "What is the matter with you? Have you had bad news?"

"No," I answered. I remember vaguely noticing how queer my voice sounded. "Good news, wonderful news. In fact, so good that I feel stunned, somehow. Shall we sit down?"

We did, and I clutched the papers tighter while I made a bungling effort to tell my story.

"It's about you," I blurted out at last. "You know I told you those publishers who refused weren't the only firm in the world. I stole your MS., or borrowed it, if you like, and sent it to my own firm. And they have accepted it."

It could scarcely have been worse done. I heard

him gasp as if choked. This made me lose my head completely and I hurried on to the end.

"Here is the agreement form. You can sign it to-day. And here is the cheque. Translations, you see, aren't like original works, and I thought you would rather have a sum down than a royalty. Of course, if the book sells extremely well, they will give you a royalty too, after the first thousand or so. They are awfully nice."

And I laid the papers on his knee. If such a face could be whiter than it always was, his turned whiter then, and he leant back against the wall as if he were going to faint. He didn't say one word. Obviously, he was incapable of speech.

Then, a gleam of sense came to me, and I did one of the most artistic things I have ever done in my life. But I claim no merit for it. It was like an instinct, a compelling intuition, rather than a deliberate act of reason. I got up, very quietly, glided across the grassy floor, and left him alone.

It was no longer the place for me—or for any mortal. If the angels were there, I could imagine that even they reverently veiled their faces before the first uplifting of that white soul to its God.

As I walked slowly back along the cliff verge, I pictured his sensations, his first coherent thought, his first words of gratitude to Heaven. I looked at it all, through his own eyes, and I saw the heights and depths, the past and future. And I knew that this broken life was now made whole and adorned with a beauty such as few lives possessed in the world that day.

At last, I wandered to the Randals, and, upon

arriving, found it was lunch time and that they were both in. They greeted me effusively and, of course, noticing my stunned condition, clamoured for explanations.

"It's Mr. Douglas," I began, feebly. "I have got that manuscript accepted. The cheque came this morning. He can order his little chapel to-morrow if he likes and his heart's desire can be accomplished in two or three weeks."

Mrs. Randal promptly burst out crying. The doctor clamoured for explanations. So I told them, as clearly as I could, the story of his great ambition, and its present fulfilment. They had had no idea of it, it seemed.

He had always kept it secret from everyone, doubtless for fear of obtaining help for his project by human means which would not, to him, have been clearly the will of Heaven.

Honestly, I don't think three happier people ever sat down to a meal together. Of course, I had had to shed a few tears in sympathy with Mrs. Randal, and, indeed, they were a relief.

"I wonder what he's doing now, if he has gone home, whether he fainted, if he will come and see me this afternoon," I speculated, drying my eyes. "I shall never face him alone. I say, couldn't you send a boy or someone up with a note to Halsanger, saying if he calls there for me, to ask him to come on here to see us all—and then like the dear you are, keep me here this afternoon."

The idea was received with instant approval, a messenger was despatched, and an hour later, as we expected, our hero himself turned up. It seemed to

me that he looked taller and straighter since morning—as though the limp, useless muscles had received a stimulus. I saw the doctor eye him keenly as he shook hands, and the searching glance softened to approval.

Then, as Mrs. Randal and I were utterly tongue-tied, he broke the ice by some half-jesting, half-affectionate congratulations, and hurried on to the question of the site of the chapel. It was cleverly done, but Percivale was not to be diverted. He turned again to me and poured out such an ecstasy of gratitude as my ears had never heard before. I tried, ineffectually, to stop him. I might as well have tried to bridle the wind or check the waves of the sea. When he had, at last, finished we settled down to discuss means. He had already signed and returned the agreement to the publishers, and had written to a firm for their catalogue of iron buildings. In due time, we all drove up to Pine Tree Cottage to help him choose the site. As a matter of fact, there was practically no choice. The land in front of the little place consisted only of a few flower beds between the door and the road. At the back, a small flower and vegetable garden terminated in a grass plot some thirty feet square enclosed in a moss-grown, stone wall.

The grass plot was the obvious place.

The two men paced up and down, measuring and discussing details, till we got tired of standing and went in to see Miss Douglas who thanked me, with extraordinary warmth, for my kindness Luckily, it hadn't occurred to any of them to ask if I had had any expense in the matter. Clearly, they attributed

it all merely to moral influence, for which I was unspeakably thankful. Mr. Morgan, I knew, would never betray me.

"Of course, I am delighted that Percivale should have what he wants," continued his sister. "And, to my pagan mind, the literary success is the best part of the whole thing, because it may mean further work."

Her words were fair enough, but I could see by her manner that something was rankling, so when the Randals departed, I stayed behind to question her.

"I am glad in one way, for his sake," she repeated. "But you can't expect me to sympathise with a thing which I don't believe in, and is, to me, merely sentiment. Moreover, it ties us here more than ever, and I have always been half wildly hoping for something, anything, which might enable us to live in a less secluded place. You see, if Percivale is going to begin making money, and there is no reason why he shouldn't now he has got a start, because he is very clever and, of course, a great mystic and they say, there is a regular craze for mysticism nowadays; if he is going to make money, we might let this cottage which would be still a little more income, and get away. And if we are to stay, I myself would rather have seen that £50 used for improvements to the cottage. You have no idea how inconvenient it is, without a proper kitchen and scullery, and water laid on, especially in winter. We could have thrown out these offices from the back, and brought the water in, for such a sum. But, of course, he never thinks of my comfort. It is always religion."

She shrugged her shoulders and I felt as if someone had thrown a pail of cold water over me. Her point of view was always reasonable, and she always had a way of putting her brother in the wrong. Yet how hard it seemed that his happiness should be clouded by daily intercourse with her and, no doubt, daily bickerings of this kind. Suddenly I felt a rush of hot indignation trying to sweep away all prudence, but, with a vast effort, and for his sake, I mastered it.

"From your brother's point of view, it is natural that he should put religion before other considerations," I said, gravely. "He would be very inconsistent if he didn't. I have no religion myself, Miss Douglas, remember. But I can understand it in other people, and I never admired anyone in my life, as I admire your brother. It is now only early summer. Perhaps by the autumn, he will have made further money by his pen, and will be able to give you the extra comforts you require."

She looked at me reflectively, out of her brilliant eyes, as I said goodbye, but did not answer my remark, though she renewed her thanks for my kindness.

Then I went to Percivale who had returned to his precious grass plot.

"Do you know," I began, before he had time to speak, "I have been thinking. It's an intricate thought, but I will try to express it. You remember how awful you felt when the refusal came and your life's aim seemed scorned? Well, that apparent want of resignation, that temptation to say 'I will not serve' was really, as it turns out, caused by the

sympathy, the oneness of your will with coming events. It wasn't rebellion. It was resignation."

He looked surprised. Then, he laughed.

"Phyllis, you are a casuist—besides a theologian and a mystic. I see what you mean."

"Do you really, you clever creature?" I exclaimed eagerly. "Then translate it for me into your own ecclesiastical language."

"You mean that when my will rebelled against failure, it was, instinctively, in accordance with God's will because He did not will failure?"

"Yes."

"That's a great thought," he said, after a pause.

"Often, we look ahead in life and think we see something contrary to what we wish, and get into a mad rage. But when the thing actually comes, we find it is exactly what we wanted. So the mad rage is, really, only a rebellion of our will against an event, a circumstance, which God never intends, making our rebellion a conformity with His will, really. Yes, I see what you mean. And I do agree that, with well-disposed souls, one may generally take a feeling of immense repugnance about some possible future event, as a sign that they will never be asked to bear that particular cross."

The following week, a beautiful thing happened. A certain amount of levelling of the grass plot was found to be necessary, before the cement foundations for the iron room could be laid down, and when the men opened the sod, there, lying close under it, they found a quantity of granite. It was, of course, a rocky neighbourhood, but the local mason declared that the quality of this stone was unknown in those

parts, the local stone being usually too porous for building purposes, and invariably too soft to cut into corner-stones or lintels. The men strongly advised the building of the chapel with stone, rather than the erection of an iron room, and Dr. Randal came in, one morning, to tell me the latest news about it. He was immensely interested in the discovery.

"Have you heard that Douglas has countermanded the room, and has decided to make the place of granite?" he asked, eagerly. "I've just met him down the road, and I thought I must look in and tell you, because you are so mixed up with the affair. He'll tell you himself later, of course. But he's completely absorbed in the thing. It won't be any cheaper than the other because the stone will want cutting, of course. But there won't be any expense of carting. The men have gone into it very carefully, and say there is undoubtedly enough. And they have estimated that it can be done, roofing and all, for inside the £50. You see, it's a tiny place, and only one storey. Blackcombe is shaken to its foundations by the discovery. I am perfectly astounded at the interest an apparently small thing seems to have created. Everywhere I go, every patient I visit, I get nothing but enquiries about 'poor Mr. Douglas's stone quarry.' Of course, the man himself is much loved and pitied. But the romantic side of the affair has appealed to them. They say 'It was meant to be.' Of course, it *is* artistic, when you come to think of it. Percivale himself is in a seventh heaven. He is going to lay the foundation stone, shortly. The idea was one of

the workmen's, not his. And they won't hear of his refusing."

Of course, I hastened to Pine Tree Cottage, after the doctor's departure. I hadn't been for nearly a week, as I was much in arrears with my book, and when I turned the corner, I was staggered at the amount of stone already dug out. The opening was only thirty feet or so square, and four deep, and, already, the excavated portion seemed more than the hole could have held, while there were still masses waiting to be got out.

I stood, fascinated. Then one of the workmen paused, wiped his wet brow and addressed me.

"Never saw the like of this, did you, Miss? 'Tis so hard as flint and so white as marble, and the seams are all jointed, like, just ready for us to cut. It was to be, you see. It was to be. Us can't think, really, where 'tis all coming from. It seemeth to grow as us gets it out. If you was to put 'en back again, or try to, the hole wouldn't hold it. There's hundreds more stone out already, than ever the place held. 'Tis a wonnerful thing, sure 'nough."

He shook his head solemnly, spat on his palms and resumed his work with the sharp iron jumper.

Presently, Percivale appeared and again I was struck with the look of greater vitality about him.

"Let's go for a turn to the ruins," I pleaded. "I want to talk over this new wonder."

"You can guess what it is to me, can't you? I mean, it's so much jollier to get a stone building than an iron one. Now, I don't mind confessing

that I hate iron buildings rather worse than most artistic people hate them. And then, of course, stone is so durable. My tiny chapel will stand for centuries. But the inner meaning of the thing is what cheers me so. To speak cold-bloodedly, that stone has been waiting there from the foundations of the world—for me. If I could doubt, ever should doubt in years to come, that I had been meant to build, that solid granite is my answer. There, on that spot, and no other, for that purpose and no other, it is clear why the stone was found."

In due time, the foundation-stone was laid. We all went to the informal little ceremony, and, at the last moment, just as he was manipulating the trowel full of cement, Percivale turned to me, asking me in a low tone, to guide his hand because he feared to spill the mixture.

"If you don't mind, just hold your hand over mine, to steady it," he whispered.

I did so, gladly, and then it suddenly occurred to me that thus the laying of the stone was a joint affair done by him and by me. And in my own grateful mind, I accused him of a ruse to draw me into it.

Later in the day, I boldly taxed him with it and, after a little hesitation, he confessed.

"And you called public attention to your own weakness, and shared that supreme joy with a good-for-nothing minx—oh, how can you!" I almost sobbed.

Then I begged from him the glove which he had worn at the time. And I have it now, that shabby, cement-stained glove.

That evening, I strolled down to the ruins at sunset.

I had then, only been six weeks in Blackcombe, but the time seemed to me like years. I tried to analyse myself but, for once, self baffled me. I was conscious of many things, all too great and vague for analysis. One was the feeling that this six weeks was the only portion out of all my happy life in which I really *lived*. Looking back on my previous existence, it seemed to me that I had been a healthy, happy animal, nothing more. What was the difference? Had I developed what Percivale called a soul? Or was it love?

Vaguely troubled, I then recalled the first visit to the ruins, and my absurd mistake about the beautiful Lady Mary. It was bewildering to see the faith which I had then thought so dead, still living, to see a somewhat similar chapel being raised in her honour, most bewildering of all, to know that I myself had been drawn into playing the chief part in its revival.

It was a beautiful story, even looked at objectively. Then I tried the subjective view, and wondered why I couldn't believe as Percivale believed. It seemed incongruous that the chief actor, or one of the chief actors in a drama, should play her part in mental darkness. And it was the more incomprehensible because I felt no antagonism to his creed. So far as I knew anything of it, there was not one doctrine which repelled me, and most of them strangely attracted me. And in my one marvellous hour of faith, I had felt a happiness which my mind had never before conceived. Clearly, I was without

prejudice. More, I longed to believe. Where was the flaw? I could see the Christian life, creed, ideal, as an exquisite picture at a distance from me. But I couldn't get close to it, couldn't touch it, make it part of myself. I pondered until twilight came to darken the windows of day with her dusky velvet-soft curtains and to light the star-lamps of night, one by one, as though she loved to do her task slowly and unaided.

Then I thought again of Percivale and of what the first Mass in the chapel would mean to him. And suddenly I shivered, wondering whether the floods of temptation would overwhelm his soul at the contrast between his barren anointing and the privileges of the officiating priest.

CHAPTER XIV

THE REAL WOMAN

THAT first week in June, Percivale wrote in his diary this passage, which I strongly suspect, applies to most of us in this "vale of tears." This dark valley is self-made by most of us, I fancy.

"Lord, in looking down at the dark valley of my anxieties from my present mountain summit of peace, I see that all the darkness might have been avoided. I need never have left the light and sunshine of the height. It was never Thou Who didst call me down. I descended because of my own foolish lack of trust and over-anxiety. In looking over it all, there is not one fear, one nervous apprehension which was justified. Not one has ever been realised. Not one has come to pass. I love to record it, in black and white against myself, so that if ever in the future, I am again anxious, downcast, impatient; mere shame will restore my peace of soul, if I am so base that Thy love fails to. Besides this lesson of trust, may I learn, too, the lesson of being as patient with my fellow creatures who worry me, as Thou hast been with me."

One glorious morning in mid-July, I received a

note from Mrs. Randal, telling me that she had suddenly thought of a way of helping Mr. Douglas in his preparations, which would also give much joy to herself. "You know what a poor idle thing I am," she wrote, "and how I spend my whole time in needlework. Well, it has occurred to me that it would be an ideal way of spending this summer to lie, or sit, out in the rose garden, making the altar linen and vestments that he requires. They are expensive to buy, and it would be like a new life to me to select patterns and designs and carry them out. I hasten to share this delightful discovery with you, and to ask if there is any 'needle service' you would like to render."

What an offer it was to any young woman with a passion for embroidery! After a great deal of discussion, and selection, all guided by Percivale, it was decided that I should undertake the linen and Mrs. Randal, the silk necessaries. She was a far better needle woman than I, and the satin vestments embroidered in silk, were very elaborate, while much of this work had to be done on frames. Moreover, it was imperative to keep it clean, and I confess that my favourite work is always some article which can be rumpled up, carried about out of doors, and generally maltreated, because washing, and "getting up" is part of its process of manufacture.

White would be the colour for the first Mass, we were informed, so Mrs. Randal set to work upon the white chasuble for which she had procured a beautiful design of madonna lilies in natural colours. These she embroidered so exquisitely that, at a little distance, they looked as if painted. The vestment

was lined with pale gold silk, the shade of the lilies' hearts.

My department was the small articles of which I did not then know the names: corporals, purificators, lavabos, and palls. Some of these had a little red cross in the middle only, some, crosses at the four corners. I finished them all, according to directions, and then set to work on the two plain white under altar cloths. The outside cloth was to be also of linen, embroidered with a deep design of passion flowers in red and blue washing cotton, the alb, that long white tunic-like linen garment worn by the priest under his chasuble, being of the same design, to match the altar cloth.

How well I remember those happy afternoons! I used to get my writing finished in the morning, so as to join Mrs. Randal directly after lunch. Then, for the hottest part of those voluptuous July days, we used to sit under a great cedar, with easy-chairs and work-tables scattered about the velvet-like lawn: and from our cool green shade we could look out at the blazing rose garden, a mass of pink, pale gold, white, cream, and blood-red against a background of sapphire Devonshire sea. At teatime, Percivale and the doctor usually joined us, circumstances permitting.

Often, in looking back, I think it was a good thing I did not realise the work that my happy, though half-unconscious, fingers were doing. If I had wholly understood Percivale's creed, and the uses to which he believed my linen would be put, sheer terror would have paralysed me. I only understood it sufficiently to realise that a great mystery surrounded

the simple white cloths, and that, to him, they were the most sacred and precious objects. This last fact, in itself, filled me with never-ending delight. Mrs. Randal's work was, of course, by far the most interesting to watch; yet I noticed that his dark eyes rested, almost continually, on my fine hemming and tiny, simple red crosses. Sometimes, he would take up from my work-table the little piles which lay, finished or not yet begun, and would finger them, in a deep reverie.

"Do tell me what you think of when you do that," I pleaded, one day, as he was sitting with some of four-crossed linen squares in his limp right hand. "You know you have no secrets from me."

He laughed at this impertinence—then hesitated, and I coaxed on. "Tell me why those are always your favourites and why you like to watch me sewing. Mrs. Randal's work is lovely, and she is so deft."

"Yes. She and her work together is a group of statuary in ivory white. But your work, little sister, is like that other woman's, who made the swaddling clothes, the seamless robe, the loin cloth, the grave clothes—all the garments her Son required from birth to burial. And, besides this, your linen work is for the most sacred and intimate of all purposes: the silken lilies are very lovely, but the Blessed Sacrament, the Host itself, rests on your linen corporal."

His simple words, so gently said, thrilled me like an electric current. I dropped my work, and felt the blood rush from my cheeks back to my heart in a great hard wave. The last part of his sentence literally terrified me, with its stupendous, awful mystery. But, after a few seconds it was forgotten

in the picture of *motherhood* which his words had suddenly opened out before me. I just had time to notice his look of amazement at my sudden loss of colour, then, providentially, some ladies appeared on the lawn and, in the diversion of his attention caused by their advent, I slipped behind the cedar trunk and thence away into solitude.

Truly, that afternoon was one of the most momentous of my whole life. Those few short words on motherhood had, for the first time, brought home to me what it is to be motherless. Dimly, yet surely, I looked along the past vista of my happy years and saw all that I had missed by having missed my mother's love. Yet even this absorbing thought gave place, in time, to the other, the dominating thought in Percivale's answer—the thought of that woman, that mother, whose sorrow surely outweighed all the other sorrows of earth. Since May, I had been haunted by a mental vision of exquisite womanhood, the vision of one of my own sex adorned with all the gifts which this sex can possess. Mary, the Star of the Sea, had been gradually assuming a more real and less symbolic form. I had watched, with reverence, the signs of Percivale's faith in and love for his liege lady who, to him, was as real as I myself, and now, I realised that his faith had influenced me. I loved him so dearly that whatever he believed, I tried to believe, not for its own sake, but for his. His love for ideal womanhood had made me love it too, though I only half believed in the *actual* existence of Mary, Star of the Sea. But, that golden afternoon, the vision of her motherhood affected what merely her womanhood had never done for me. Suddenly, I found I

believed in her, believed that she was near, that she could see and hear me. My own motherless young womanhood reached out and found her, the type, the fountain of all Motherhood. Yes, the thing was true. Mary, the woman, might have ceased to be. Mary, the Mother, never. If there was a God—and I had, for some time, believed in Him, in a far-off way—it was inconceivable that He could let *divine* motherhood drop back into non-existence. If only for His own sake, He would immortalise it. Any man would, provided he possessed the necessary power. God was Man Who did possess it. And, apart from His own personal view, there was the divine conception of eternal motherhood which was too sublime to fall into nothingness.

As long as motherhood shall last, there shall last, before its Creator's eyes, the perfect pattern.

I walked up and down the lily path, like a creature in a dream. Never before had the Motherhood of Mary been shown to me. But, more astounding still, neither had the Manhood of God. Hitherto, I had vaguely thought of the Incarnation (when I had thought at all) as an historic fact of nearly two thousand years ago, which was as far off and unreal as the creation of Adam and Eve, or the days of the deluge. But those simple words about the linen, linen once used by Christ, the God made Man, linen in my hands to-day, designed, in some way, for God's use again, brought the thing violently home to me in concrete form. If the immortal Mother still lived, so surely must her Divine Son Whom she bore. Looked at like this, the idea was less than faith. It was simply common sense.

Then my thoughts kept straying back to her life and her sorrows. The swaddling clothes, made by that rapturous young Mother for the lovely Child then dwelling in her white breast—those were the first garments she ever fashioned. And the last? That robe, woven whole, without a seam, which was torn from Him by the soldiers—did she have to stand by and see it taken, I wondered? Then I suddenly remembered the words about the loin cloth. Evidently, Catholics believed that the faithful Mother provided this, too—and, after all, it was most natural, and most like a mother, that this should have been so.

At this point, came the tears. They had been long gathering, but it pierced the tear chamber of my woman's heart, did the sudden pang of pity at the vision of this valiant woman who never failed her Son from birth to death, from manger to cross, who saw Him die still girdled by her handiwork, and who wrapped His dead body in Its last vesture.

For a long time, I stood sobbing among the great tall budding lilies which swayed to me, now and then, in delicate sympathy.

So many vistas, so many extraordinary new worlds opened out to me that afternoon, that it was almost sunset before I left the lily walk and crept back to the lawn to tidy up my work which had been left so suddenly. But the place was deserted, chairs, tables, everything had been taken in, and it was almost dark under the great silent cedar. No doubt, they thought I had long ago, gone home.

Utterly regardless of the fact that it was past supper time, and that I had had no tea, I hurried to

the little new chapel where I knew its happy owner always spent the evening hour, after the workmen had departed for the day. The walls of the little place were entirely finished, except for the outside pointing, and the wooden ribs of the roof were beginning to appear. Inside, a carpenter had been working at the wooden altar, beside which Percivale stood as I entered. He held a delicate little plane in his left hand. I watched him, for a minute, wondering if he tried to put tiny touches to the work, when the men had gone. But he was standing quite motionless, absorbed in thought. Then it suddenly came to me, by a sort of inexplicable intuition that he was thinking of that "Son of the Carpenter," and fondling the tools whose facsimiles had been used by Divine Hands in another village, centuries before.

As I watched, too moved to speak, he laid down the plane, and took up some nails and a hammer, and I saw sudden tears glitter in his eyes.

Then he caught sight of me, and I entered, with a rush to pour out as much of my recent experience as I could myself, at that time, understand. He listened with profound sympathy. Never more than upon that night, had I felt his love for me. And never had its greatness and its whiteness so comforted me.

"You know, what I do rather dread is the alb," I confided to him, after an eloquent silence. "I shall feel, all the time, that you ought to he wearing it, and I shall feel an unholy hatred of the poor innocent priest who is going to make you stand aside. Tell me, don't you feel it horribly, yourself?"

"So horribly, Phyllis, that God's patience with me is the daily marvel of my life. Now, child, you must be tired with an afternoon of such unusual emotion. Go home, have your supper, and then to bed—and sleep, mind."

True enough, the impious sensation I had prophesied, did possess me as I worked at the alb, which I left till the last. It was August before it was finished, and the first Mass was to be celebrated on the fifteenth of the month. Countless times, I had pictured the appearance and character of the priest who would wear my alb, and, continually did I plague poor Percivale for descriptions of his friend.

"He is the very antipodes of me," the patient priest kept assuring me. "He is fair, against my darkness, placid against my sensitiveness, utterly incapable of doubts, mistrust, or volcanic eruptions."

"If you can't draw him better than you draw yourself," I interrupted, one afternoon, much exasperated, "I shall have the entirely wrong idea of him that I should have of you if I didn't know you."

He laughed at my disgust.

"Well, am I not dark? There, at least, I am accurate."

"Y-e-s," I conceded, ungraciously. "Your eyes and brows are dark. But your white face and hair take off the general effect of darkness. It's the general effect of him I want, not patchy details."

"Well, I will try again. But the general effect, as well as the detail, is fairness and imperturbable placidity."

"I know the style," I snorted. "Lymphatic,

incapable of big emotions. That doesn't appeal to me."

Again he laughed.

"Felix Humphreys is the last man on earth to describe as lymphatic."

But, womanlike, I was not to be convinced. I had taken an instinctive dislike to the stranger, and wanted to give myself reasons for it.

He arrived, in due course, and Percivale brought him to my rooms to present him to me. It was the eve of the Mass, so the blessing of the little chapel, and all the altar linen was to take place that afternoon.

We walked back together, and the conversation was of the most ordinary description, led by Father Humphreys. He never alluded to the cause of his coming, to my share in the work, anything. I listened, with growing contempt and answered, when directly addressed, as shortly as civility allowed. Clearly, he was quite heartless. We found the little oratory quite full. Miss Douglas and the Randals were present, the rest being other friends and admirers of Percivale's. The little place looked so clean and pure, with its newly whitewashed walls and ceiling, its white painted altar, and brass vases of white lilies, among which were placed ears of ripe gold wheat. All the white linen was spread out, ready for its blessing, together with the beautiful white vestments. The ceremony was rather long, and very interesting. We had been provided with books, and the prayers struck me as almost prose poems, especially the ones for the actual blessing of the chapel itself, as "a place of prayer whence all

evil spirits must fly for ever, and good angels praise continually."

One could picture the departure of the powers of darkness and the coming of the spirits of light.

Late that evening, I went down again to visit the sweet little place. I walked round by the ruins first, then entered the new chapel, where a blue star-shaped lamp was burning before a beautiful statue of Mary, the Star of the Sea.

Percivale had taken great latitude in the choice of this statue which had been specially painted to his order. The tall slender figure was clothed in white robes, the only touch of colour being a mantle of pale turquoise, star-spangled. Her fair hair flowed from beneath a crown of twelve stars, and, in her arms, she carried her Child, who held a gold globe in His little hand. I noiselessly knelt down. Percivale was there, his head bowed on his left arm, lost in prayer. To my unholy surprise, Father Humphreys was there also. His arms were folded across his breast, his eyes closed, and his face upturned, motionless. I watched him, fascinated. I felt as if I would have given anything to be able to read his thoughts. In a way, he was even a greater mystery to me than Percivale ever had been, was this normal, ordinary priest. I thought over as much as I knew about priestly duties, and wondered what he felt like when saying Mass, hearing confessions, anointing the dying. Behind that placid face and white forehead, crowned by the pale gold hair, what dark secrets of men lay mysteriously buried? He looked so gentle, and yet what an unlimited spiritual power he wielded over his followers.

After a time, he moved a little and I hurriedly averted my eyes, feeling myself colour hotly with horror at the chance of being caught so rudely staring. Then he propped his elbows on the bench in front of him, and so buried his face in his hands that I could see no more of it. As neither of them took the slightest notice of my presence, I concluded I was not unwelcome, and I resolved to remain until turned out.

My thoughts were long and deep enough to fill many nights, besides which, the new experience of seeing these men at prayer, enchained me to them. The peaceful little oratory, the blue star lamp, the perfect silence, the new relationship it caused between me and Percivale, the sudden realisation that here I might spend hours watching him commune with God, all made me feel as though I could never go home.

Father Humphreys was the first to move. When he rose, I glided silently out before he turned. But, clearly, he wished to speak, for a few rapid steps brought him to my side.

"I am so glad you came," he murmured in a tone too low to disturb the other worshipper in the oratory. "You and I and Father Douglas are so to speak, the trinity of Blackcombe, aren't we? Though I, of course, am by far the most insignificant member of the trinity. It is thanks mainly to you that all these wonderful things have been done, and both as a priest and as Percivale's friend, I thank you with all my heart. You must have thought me cold and indifferent this afternoon, but no doubt you understood that I didn't like to say anything before

Percivale. It is such a delicate position for me, a case of a fool rushing in where angels fear to tread. I don't know how much or how little to say to him, even when we are alone. And with a third person present the only thing is to say nothing."

At the conclusion of this speech, I felt heartily and healthily ashamed of myself. And, with the shame, came also a sudden comprehension of this priest's difficulties. I realised how he almost loathed his strong manhood, for pity of his friend's maimed life, and I divined how he would suffer at Mass next day.

In fact, I could have almost cursed myself for my previous harsh thoughts.

"Thank you, Father," I answered, holding out my hand and half rejoicing, half-sorrowing at the strong clasp which at once met mine. "I didn't understand, I am ashamed to say. But I do now. I love your friend dearly. There is no secret about it. And I think I can almost realise what you will feel like to-morrow morning. Before you go, do let me talk to you, and ask you questions, if I may. I have been utterly spoilt and indulged in that way, so I don't know what an ordinary priest would think. But you can guess how interesting it is to see that ordinary priest at last."

"I think I can. Ask me anything you like. But remember, I may retaliate. Good-night. I shall pray specially for you at Mass to-morrow, of course."

I went home, chastened, through the moonlight; and suddenly remembered it was the first time I had ever heard poor Percivale spoken of as "Father." It seemed to me that the Randals and I now called him by nothing but his Christian name, and when

we wanted to be formal we always referred to him as "Mr." Were we right or wrong, I wondered? After all, he was an ordained priest. But then, wouldn't the title of his office if used commonly, be always a sort of mockery . . . a suggestion of barren spiritual fatherhood?

CHAPTER XV

THE DEFEAT OF DEATH

It was a golden morning, the morning of the great day. When I stepped out into the farmyard after breakfast, Susan was feeding her flock of golden-feathered pensioners with handfuls of golden Indian corn; floods of gold sunlight poured from a pale clear sky; it was just harvest time, and I could hear the whir of the machines, and the whetting of sickles far and near among the hills, from a score of golden fields while the little oratory, when I reached it, was a study in white and gold. I was early, as I had intended to be, for I wanted to see the ceremony from the very beginning to the very end, but when I entered both priests were already present, and absorbed in prayer. Long shafts of sunshine floated in and stole the light from the blue star lamp, as though jealous of its shining. Then they caressed the golden-hearted lilies, the graceful wheat, the gold-leaved missal on the altar, and lingered round Father Humphreys's fair head, until he rose to vest. The little place was again filled and, as there was no sacristy, the priest vested at the side of the altar. With mingled feelings, I watched him put on the alb. Percivale, on the other side, was simply placing

a white cotta over his black soutane, and was ready in a minute. I noticed him flush faintly as he lifted his right arm into the sleeve. A few minutes later, Father Humphreys had put on the beautiful chasuble and certainly its gentle maker could not have had a wearer who showed it to better advantage. The tall figure, white skin, delicate colour, blue eyes and pale gold hair, adorned by the shimmering white satin, with its life-like lilies and rich gold lining, suddenly made me think of a word picture from the breviary: a responsory of Paschal tide:

"Her Nazarites are become pure, alleluia. They are purer than snow, they are whiter than milk, they are more ruddy than coral, their polishing is of sapphire."

Percivale lighted the candles, and after a short, solemn pause, Mass began. I had provided myself with a missal in English and Latin, so as not to lose a word. I had never before assisted at Mass, and it seemed passing strange that I should do so at last, after having for so long learnt what it meant to my priest-friend, and passing strange that my first Mass should be one of unique character, which linked us back across a gulf of more than 350 years to the past.

They had found my places for me, putting markers in so that the stupidest of little pagans could not go astray, but not until I left "the ordinary of the Mass" to turn to the "introit" of this special day, did I realise that it was a great feast of Mary's. My heart began to beat rapidly with joy at the opening words, "Let us all rejoice in the Lord, celebrating a festal day in honour of the blessed Virgin." I liked

that "all," and the heartiness of the invitation which seemed as if it might include even me, while the "Gloria in excelsis Deo" which so soon followed the introit, seemed just the fitting hymn of praise to the Virgin's Son. The epistle gave us a beautiful word picture with the simile of the cedar, the cypress, the palm, the rose-plant and the "fair olive tree." But the most beautiful was the gradual from the 44th psalm—"The King hath greatly desired thy beauty." That desire of the King, rendered in the Latin, by the almost greedy "concupivit," somehow opened a vista of divine love and desire which held me spellbound till I saw Percivale rise at the offertory for the wine and water. I watched anxiously, lest he should drop either of the little cruets, but he managed wonderfully. First, he placed the one containing wine in his white right hand, closed the helpless fingers round it safely, and took the one with water in his left. Then turning from the credence table to the side of the altar, he slipped his left hand under his right wrist to support it, thus folding his arms in the form of a cross, and so stood, with bent head, meekly waiting till the celebrant came to take the elements from him. That was the most he could do, then—to stand aside and offer the materials for the sacrifice. He might not even himself pour them into the chalice, I noticed. This was done by Father Humphreys, and I also noticed that he, when he gave back the wine cruet, for one moment, closed his strong hands round the helpless white fingers. That finished me. Promptly I began to cry. The picture, first of Percivale standing there with his crossed, barren,

anointed hands, and then the tiny delicate action of the other priest in clasping them, told me that Father Humphreys was feeling what I felt, only more intensely. Luckily, my tears were absolutely silent. A few minutes later, he returned again to the side for the lavabo when Percivale poured a few drops of water over the fingers which were soon to offer sacrifice.

Then came the preface and the Canon, ushered in by the golden tinkle of a little bell, after which was a pregnant silence.

I knew that I was to be mentioned in the commemoration of the living, and it was easy to tell exactly when the celebrant reached this point, for he joined his hitherto extended hands, and stood, for some minutes, with bent head. I almost held my breath. It seemed impossible that this white Nazarite should, at such a solemn moment, be actually murmuring my woman's name. Yet he had assured me that he would do so and I believed him: more, I even dared, in my turn, to whisper his and Percivale's.

Then came one tinkle from the bell and the silence deepened.

The priest bent forward, stooping low over the altar for several seconds, then he knelt on one knee, rose again, and lifted the white Host high above his head. I caught sight of Percivale's upturned face, and hastily veiled my profane eyes, with bitter self-reproach for having, even inadvertently, witnessed that first look of adoration. It should have been seen by God alone.

Less than a minute later, I knew that Percivale's

words had been fulfilled, that, upon the linen I had made, rested the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacred Host.

I covered my face and saw no more till the Communion. Then, I couldn't resist raising my eyes and taking a long look at the little white Host between the priestly fingers, being held up before us, over the gold paten. And when Percivale had received it, I thrilled again to think that his treasure had come to him straight from its bed of repose on my fair linen corporal.

At that epoch, my tears ceased to flow, but I did not feel fit to face the Randals so I knelt on in my corner till everyone had gone and only the two priests were left.

This time, Percivale was the first to leave. I cowered down, conscious of a sudden horrid feeling that I ought not to have remained behind the rest. But, to my intense surprise, he touched my arm and beckoned me outside.

"I want you to have my first greeting, my first word, little sister," he said with a tenderness which destroyed my recently acquired composure. "But for your loving courage, you brave woman, Mass would never have been said here, nor I fit to receive Communion. Only God knows what I—and He—owe to you. He delights to be our debtor, remember. Kneel down, if you will, and take my blessing, for the first time."

I did so, sobbing, and he murmured some Latin words, then crossed my forehead with his left thumb.

"Are those precious tears for me? Then I shall

take my own," he said, half smiling. "Wipe them away and give me the handkerchief to keep, Phyllis, will you?"

I complied. It happened to be an all-white one, edged with narrow lace, and bearing my initials embroidered in white satin stitch. He placed it in his breast-pocket, then paused a moment before speaking again.

"Phyllis, I know well all you feel for me and about me—you and Felix. And I should like to tell you, as I shall tell him, the only thing I felt—and still feel."

I waited, breathless.

"I couldn't, can't, even *remember* myself at all. You, he, I, are swallowed up in one thought—that of Our Lord's delight. His delight, you know, is to be with the children of men. Well, I can remember nothing except that He, *He* has got His Heart's desire to-day."

At that moment the oratory door opened, and Percivale turned to greet Father Humphreys. I seized the opportunity to vanish quietly. It was no longer my place to be there, and I wanted time to think and think and think.

The gradual of the Mass, the desire of the King for the soul, followed by Percivale's words which expressed the climax of that divine desire had been a new light to me of God; of His extraordinary almost *infatuated* love for us poor mortals, when He has Himself and the angel world to love besides.

In the afternoon, we all went to tea with the Randals, and sat out under the cedar on the lawn which had been the scene of our happy preparations.

"You came in the Mass this morning," I said, looking up through the dusky layers outspread above us. "And so did the rose, but she had gone. Thank heaven, Mrs. Randal has immortalised the lilies, for they have left us too."

We all looked across to the rose garden where now stately hollyhocks, star-like single dahlias and giant sunflowers bloomed.

"If I were a flower," said Father Humphreys, who was smoking with the doctor, "I should prefer to be a sunflower. And next to that, a harebell."

The preposterous contrasts of the choice, and his air of serene calm were too much for me. I burst out laughing.

He looked at me with a mild surprise which aggravated my hilarity. I roared till everyone else was laughing in sympathy.

"I don't know why I should go on in this idiotic way," I said, when I could speak. "But it's such an absurd idea altogether. And then, he couldn't have chosen two more violent extremes. The sunflower is, without exception, the gaudiest, most noticeable flower in the garden or out of it, while the harebell is, if possible, even more retiring than the violet. You can't want to be both, because one contradicts another."

"Not necessarily," said Percivale, quickly. "You don't give the flowers their due, Phyllis. The sunflower isn't famous for its gaudiness but for its fidelity. You know, it is supposed always to turn its face to its god, the sun."

Father Humphreys nodded approvingly.

"That's why I choose it, of course. And as you

say, the harebell is retiring, blooms in out-of-the-way spots, and is not common to all parts of the country. If I could be a sunflower, and yet as unnoticed and retired as the harebell—that's what I mean."

I saw Percivale look searchingly at his friend. Then I diverted his attention by asking what emblem he would choose.

"While we are being idiotic, let's be thoroughly so."

"But if it is to become general, you ladies ought to take the lead," he objected. "Mrs. Randal, choose your flower, we implore you."

"Mine would be heartsease," she answered, dreamily.

"White heartsease, then," I amended. "Yes, that fits you to a T. Mine? Oh, the lily. I think there's no flower like them. They are so tall and strong, yet so dainty. They have ever so many blossoms on one stem, and they never get blown to bits and dishevelled like roses."

"Comparisons are odious," murmured Father Humphreys.

"And their smell, oh their smell! Then the shining petals like wax, like mother-of-pearl, like silver, like nothing on earth but their own lovely selves."

"It's a good thing they're over," interrupted the doctor. "It's enough to turn them red with blushes to hear such fulsome praise."

"Well, what is yours?" I asked, turning on him.

"Mine? Good heavens, I don't know. The tobacco plant."

"Nonsense. That isn't distinctive enough. It

ought to be balm or balsam or something that typifies healing."

"Well, give me the poppy—the white poppy for sleep. Opium is made from white poppies."

"Beautiful! Now, Percivale, you can't escape any longer."

"Can't I? Then I will choose the thorn."

My jaw dropped. "The thorn? What a horrid thing!"

"Is it? Then you be rose to it—white rose to my thorn."

"But I have chosen the lily," I said dubiously. "I can't change. I don't want to, really. What babies we are!"

"We are and long life to us," said Father Humphreys, throwing away the end of his cigarette. "Miss Lambert, I hear you are a tennis player and I herewith challenge you to a single."

"It's awfully hard work," I objected. "And surely, priests don't play games?"

"Why, in the name of wonder, not?" laughed the doctor. "They are, after all, only men with men's muscles and need of exercise."

"Come for a row instead, if you would rather," said Father Humphreys. "It would be lovely this afternoon on the water. Mrs. Randal, may we have the pleasure of taking you? I hear Miss Lambert is a first-rate oar."

Our hostess assented so we strolled down to the boathouse on their private beach, and soon embarked. The doctor and Percivale remained behind.

Father Humphreys gallantly assigned the position of stroke to me, and it certainly was delicious to

glide out over the clear green water which was so smooth that one could see the marine forest of brown-gold seaweeds underneath us.

To my delight, as soon as we were fairly under way, Mrs. Randal led the conversation to the events of the morning. She looked sweet, sitting in the stern, in her white woollen dress, holding the tiller in one slender white hand.

It appeared to me, from her sympathetic remarks and questionings, that she had felt exactly what I had—and she appeared to understand the Mass far better. Father Humphreys seemed delighted to be able to pour himself out freely on the subject of Percivale.

"I never said a Mass with so much emotion," he confessed, "When I turned to him for the cruets at the offertory, I could have burst out crying at the sight of him. And yet, you know, he was absolutely happy. It's an extraordinary life. To a man who believes thoroughly and consistently, any priest's life is extraordinary, his own most of all, because he alone knows the extent of his good-for-nothingness, if I may coin a word. But Percivale's life—it's a prolonged miracle of faith and love. There's no merit in my loving God. There is when he does. Why, in his position, I'm certain I should be a howling atheist."

Mrs. Randal laughed and looked at me. Clearly, she remembered the far-off morning when I had voiced similar views.

"Well," I said wickedly, "shall we put you ashore? We aren't fit company for you, you see."

"He'll have awful times to fight through yet,"

continued Father Humphreys, not noticing our aside. "It's all very well now, but reaction must come. It's the law of both nature and grace. But I hope to God he'll never give in, even if it costs him life and reason. I love his life, love it, simply. Humanly speaking, he hasn't one help or consolation. And that service of pain is so rare. We can, most of us, serve God, when our lines fall in pleasant places. But that service of suffering from the very highest motive, not suffering because Christ once suffered, but suffering so that Christ may still suffer in us, in our person, ah, there's the difference, the whole difference."

By tacit consent, we lay on our oars and drifted. After a bit, he continued:

"I admire his life, more, I worship it. That's what I meant when we were fooling about the sunflower and the harebell. I was thinking of him with his brave, great soul always turned to his Sun, yet his whole life as unseen as the harebell on a lonely heath."

"Now I understand," I exclaimed, twisting round to look at him. "I wondered when he explained it, if there was some inner meaning to it. But do tell me this, why did he choose the thorn?"

"That choice is characteristic of the man. Pain, suffering, you see; and then, nearness to God."

I stared. "Nearness to God? I don't understand."

"Well, what once was the thing chosen to crown a divine brow in death? Roses, lilies, flowers—or thorns? Wasn't it the thorn that crowned life in death, and drank the life-blood of a God?"

"O—h," I gasped. "I never, never should have guessed that. And he asked me to be the rose."

"I know he did," said Father Humphreys, with a twinkle. "And I confess I was jealous of you, Miss Lambert. I'd give my ears to be asked to play rose to Percivale's thorn."

"I will, I will, if only I understand what you mean," I moaned. "But I'm out of my depth utterly."

"Well, you're a good swimmer, if all accounts of a certain brave mermaiden be true," he answered, still smiling. "The rose is the flower of love, the white rose, of virginal love. And love is the other half of Percivale's life, or rather the whole from which everything springs. If there were no rose, there could be no thorn. And his devotion and gratitude, and admiration for you are something more than you dream of. I am sure there isn't anyone in the world he loves so much. Do you think there is?" he added, appealing to Mrs. Randal, while I blushed fiery red at this unexpected and overwhelming tribute.

"I'm sure there isn't," she answered, promptly. "No, you'll have to throw your lily overboard, Phyllis, and be the rose and not only the rose, but all that it means."

"I'll do my best," I said, with a choke. "I only half understand, even now. But I always hope I shall understand better some day."

Then we resumed our oars, and pulled out until we could see the ruined chapel, and the new one standing on the side of the hill above it.

"Well, if the object of your faith is dead the

faith itself has survived," I said, dreamily. "But it isn't dead, never has been, never will be. You know, if I had had any sense, I should have known that a deep and widespread faith can't be delusion. I mean, effects can't exist without a cause. A faith which has existed for hundreds, almost thousands of years, by its very existence argues that it springs from a cause."

"That's so, if you admit the theory of cause and effect at all," said Father Humphreys, laughing.

"But how can you help admitting it?" I asked, ruffled. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I seem to have heard that some don't," he replied, demurely. "For instance, the theory of the spontaneous creation of the universe which does away with any necessity for any cause."

"Oh bosh!" I exclaimed, inelegantly. "And where did all the matter come from out of which the globe spontaneed? Let's go home to tea."

CHAPTER XVI

THE BEGGAR MAID AND THE KING

THE Mass next day was early, before breakfast-time even. Its late hour, the preceding morning, had only been out of consideration for those who wanted to be present. At a quarter to seven, I found that I composed the congregation. As I followed the wonderful rite again, it suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't the faintest idea what "the Assumption" meant. My ignorance only came home to me by degrees.

At the first favourable opportunity, I plagued Father Humphreys for enlightenment.

"It is simply the resurrection of Our Lady from the dead. But as she was raised up, or 'assumed' by His power, and did not rise of her own power, as her Divine Son did, we call hers 'assumption' rather than resurrection, you see. One is passive, the other active."

I thought over this technical definition till the whole idea broke in on me.

"You mean, that you believe she is, body and soul, in Heaven now, and was taken there, a short time after her death?"

"Yes," he answered promptly. "But why throw all the faith on me? Don't you believe it?"

I laughed, then reflected again.

"Yes. If one believes in her at all, this doctrine seems so necessary, so inevitable. We are not perfect human beings, when we are soul only and our bodies are dead, are we? And one can't imagine Mary as ever having remained imperfect or incomplete. Besides, one can't imagine God letting His Mother's body remain dead, even if He had chosen to preserve it incorrupt. No man would, if he could help it. Think what motherhood means to a man."

Father Humphreys nodded approvingly.

"Your remarks do credit to both your mind and heart. No one but a woman could have put it just like that. It's all true, what you say—and what you artistically don't say, but only suggest. Though, to me, perhaps the sweetest point about the doctrine of the Assumption is that it places womanhood, body and soul, in Heaven. It's sheer rapture, to me, to think that Heaven wasn't quite Heaven to God till He got a perfect woman there. And when women fall below man's ideal of them, as they sometimes do, being mortal, I love to think that Mary's immortalised womanhood intercedes for them, and will lift them up at the end."

"No one but a man could have thought of that," I retorted. "You make me miserably jealous. I shan't talk to you any more."

"Don't threaten," he pleaded in mock alarm. "As you are great, be merciful. Sit on this sheltered bank while I smoke my morning pipe. Then I must go in and write letters."

"Better come and dictate them to me at the typewriter," I advised, seating myself. "Have you got a fusee, or shall I hold your hat while you light up? As I possess brothers, I am a dab at pipe-lighting."

"Thank you. As I, on my side, own at least half a dozen sisters, I miss feminine attentions, gentle or the reverse."

"Do they ill-treat you very badly?" I asked, sympathetically.

"Frightfully. I am black and blue, half the holidays. Besides, don't you see what a sniped, cowed air I always have?"

"Oh, it's good to be alive!" he exclaimed, after a pause. "Mere physical existence is ecstasy."

I stared at him, surprised.

"Do you feel like that?" I exclaimed, with unfaltering emphasis on the pronoun. "I should have thought you are too calm and equable to have ecstasies, heights and depths of emotion."

"Is thy servant a stone that he should not rejoice in life as your volcanic natures do?" he asked reproachfully. "Still waters run deep, Miss Lambert, and a volcano is a very tame looking object on the surface, half its time."

"I can't help meditating on that Assumption doctrine," I went on, apologetically after a pause. "Do I bore you when I talk spirituals over a pipe?"

"Of course not," he answered, promptly. "And don't suggest that a pipe is *un*spiritual. But we'll come back to that later. Tell me your thought first."

"Oh," I stammered, unnerved at this invitation. "All I meant was that I admire the completeness of

the thing. I mean, the way it seems to rub in that our bodies as well as our souls are immortal."

"Excuse me," he said, interrupting. "You told me you would ask me questions, and I told you I should retaliate. May I ask, now, if you believe these things you discuss, I mean, for instance, do you believe in a future life for soul and body?"

"I don't know," I moaned. "I only know that it appeals to me immensely as being utterly logical and reasonable and, in a way, inevitable. But it seems to me that if this is faith, it is abstract faith, outside myself. I mean, I can believe that you and Percivale will have these future privileges, though I am doubtful about myself."

"I see," he said, thoughtfully. The remark cheered me because it was more than I did.

"Yes," he went on after a pause, during which *I* noticed that his pipe had gone out, and *he* didn't. "That is one of my pet theories—the cult of the body, so to speak. I mean, I can't stand separating nature and grace, as if nature were wholly evil. After all, God made our bodies as well as our souls, and, in many ways, it seems to me that a body is a more intricate and difficult thing to make than a soul. There are two classes of saints: one man looks on his body as corrupted by the fall and as an impediment to the soul and therefore maltreats and torments it; the other, regards it as God's living tabernacle (which it is) and reverences it accordingly. I don't say which way is the higher. I only say the last is *mine*. In Heaven, we shall have our bodies, these very same eyes, hands, lips, hearts that are living now; and it seems to me that some of us on

earth ought to anticipate heavenly life, if possible, and give God the harmonious worship of our whole nature. It's our fault, not His, that humanity has been corrupted by the fall. He made it fair and lovely enough and my notion is to get back to His original ideal. You know, I always think it's a wonderful picture, the devotion of S. Benedict to his sister S. Scholastica. It comes in the sixth lesson for her feast. He was an austere abbot and she an austere abbess. Yet they loved each other so dearly, that, when she died, he gave orders that her pure body was to be buried in the grave waiting for him. And when he came to die, almost his last words were to remind his monks to bury him beside, or in the same grave with, his sister. There's fraternal devotion for you—and devotion to the body. And so far from overlooking it as mortal weakness, the Church has selected it among loads of other incidents of their lives, to immortalise in the breviary.

"So, with natural pleasures and natural beauties. The saint who turned her eyes away from the beautiful lily doesn't appeal to me. But I love the one who buried her face in it, taking all the pleasure of sight and smell, and thanked God for making such a flower and for giving her the capacity to enjoy it. Her way was so much more *gracious*. It seems to me rough on the Lord to turn away from His natural works, just because they are natural: I know this would hurt my feelings, if I had made lovely things for my friends, and I often think it must hurt His. That blue dress of yours, Miss Lambert," he went on, glancing at me, "your beautiful blue rings and bracelet and necklace—turquoise aren't they?—

would be called vanity and immortification by some. Myself, I should say, they are gifts from God meant to further beautify beautiful womanhood. If I were a woman, I should't hesitate always to look my best, for God's sake, if not for man's. It always seems to me the more gracious and the more loving way. Of course, don't waste either money or time in self-adornment, and be ready to give it all up, if necessary. Even my prosaic pipe—which has gone out, by the way—may be taken as an innocent pleasure, provided I am always moderate and disciplined in its use. My theory is that God has given us our senses for enjoyment and intends them to be enjoyed for His sake. Otherwise, where's the sense of having attached such pleasure to them or of having given us so many means of satisfying them? For instance, why should He have given us a sense of taste? Life could be maintained without. Obviously because He likes us to enjoy what we eat. But that isn't eating to enjoy, mind. Distinguo. Again, why need He have made flowers to smell? They are lovely enough, in all conscious, when they are scentless. But He wants to add that pleasure for the sake of our second sense. Of course, all this must spring from divine love or it will degenerate into self-indulgence. But some of us ought to be perfect and consistent lovers, for the sake of God."

"It's simply lovely," I said, reflectively. "If I were God, I can't help thinking I should prefer that service to the other. But it seems so easy."

"So the service of God ought to be," he exclaimed, with animation. "Doesn't Christ Himself say 'My yoke is sweet and My burden light? It's nothing

but ease and joy to serve those we love. Surely, we ought to downright enjoy serving God too? Mind, I don't mean to say that we, I, ought to avoid pain and suffering, or to dread it. If it comes and when it comes, I hope I shall welcome it as another of His gifts, given in love. My will, any way, would welcome it, and rejoice in it, even if my weak flesh quailed. But I couldn't seek out pain, or inflict it on myself. I could only take it direct from Him as I do pleasure. I shouldn't seek pain any more than I seek pleasure. I take it all from Him as it comes. As for scourging myself, or going unwashed, I could no more do such things than I could strike the tabernacle or allow it to be dirty. God made my body and dwells in it. For His sake I couldn't maltreat it. It is too unutterably holy."

"Don't you seek your pipe?" I asked, demurely, after a pause.

He laughed.

"No. Used as moderately as I use it, it is good for my health, and it is the main joy of one of my sister's lives to supply brother Felix with tobacco. When she fails me, I shouldn't spend my own money on it. And I should drop it promptly if I found it was getting bad for my health or that I was becoming a slave to it. As long as these points are all right, and I can heartily thank Heaven for the pleasure it gives me, it is part of the scheme."

A few days later, I was rather surprised to receive a note from Percivale asking me to be at home in the morning, as he wanted to come and see me. He had never made an appointment like this before, and I wondered if it was anything about his book

which had been recently sent to press. However, on arrival, he assured me it wasn't, and assented to my suggestion that it was a pity to waste such a lovely morning indoors, so we strolled down to the ruins. He was very silent all the way, and seated himself on the stone pile, still in silence.

"What is it, dear big brother?" I asked, with sudden alarm. "Are you ill? Has something gone wrong?"

"No I'm not ill—only wicked. The poor thorn needs its white rose to-day, Phyllis," he added with a faint smile.

"Does it?" I answered, my heart touched by his manner. "Well, it shall have it. You know I threw the lily overboard the other evening so as to take the rose. Tell me at once, what is the matter."

"Oh, Phyllis, I am a beast. I hate to pain and worry you when you thought you had made me so happy, and had given me my heart's desire. And so I am and so you have, if it weren't for my hatefulness. But I can't, can't, can't get used to it . . . seeing him offering Mass every morning. I hadn't counted the cost. You see, since ordination, I have been practically without Mass except on Sundays, and I have never served it before. It's being at such close quarters with it, having it in my own chapel, seeing my own friend say it, day after day. All the old temptations and doubts have returned with tenfold fury. And added to it, is another, the most horrible of all—I feel as if I loathe the very sight of that healthy, happy priest. Can you imagine any human being capable of such baseness? I can't," he concluded with a gesture of despair. "I was

happy, utterly at peace that first day. This has come since."

I stood aghast. I tried to remember how I had comforted him before, but not a word would return to my mind. He had opened his soul to me, had chosen me, before all, for his confidante and now I, who had never failed, was going to fail him.

Then to my mingled horror and relief, Father Humphreys entered, with an expression on his face which I had never seen there. If a man's face can wear the look of motherhood, that was the look: or was it not motherhood, but priesthood? He was pale but perfectly at ease and gave me a tender reassuring glance as he passed me, to kneel down beside Percivale, who started violently. He hadn't heard or seen him come in.

"Percivale, old fellow, I was outside and heard. I could have helped it, of course, but I didn't choose to. I deliberately listened and I'm glad I did. This is one of the darkest hours of your life and I'm going to share it with you, man, shoulder to shoulder."

I drew aside to a corner where they would not notice me. I suppose, nay I know, that I ought to have had the decency to withdraw. But I didn't. Anxiety for Percivale made me dead to every conventional feeling. I dreaded lest Father Humphreys should fail. Before, I had, for that marvellous hour, put on the priesthood and fought for the white soul. Now, I saw a real priest fighting instead. His method was so simple as to be sublime. And his victory was instantaneous. I had poured out a flood of words. He proceeded straight to action. Taking off his hat, he flung it on the grass, took Percivale's

unresisting hands in his, and made him raise his head.

"Now, old friend, look me straight in the face, grasp my hands as tight as you can hold—and tell me that you loathe the sight of me. Tell me you hate me."

I stared, literally spellbound. So did Percivale, for that matter. We both gazed at the noble brow, crowned with fair hair, at the steady lips, the clear blue eyes that were as pure as a child's, at the whole attitude of humility, as he knelt, bareheaded at his friend's feet, and then with a groan that was half a sob, and a smothered "God forgive me," Percivale turned aside and hid his face on his arm. Father Humphreys rose, watched him a moment with that look which so fascinated me and which seemed to say "He is mine—all mine, and I will save him." Then he paced up and down a little and, at last, returned to Percivale.

"You are an old duffer," he said, half playfully though I could see his lips quivering. "But it's hard to judge one's own case and I should have been just as idiotic. But you ought to have known better than to have imagined you could hate me. You had only to look at me to know that you are as fond of me as ever."

"Of course I ought," agreed Percivale, raising his head and looking up with an expression which made my heart rejoice. "You have exorcised that demon for ever, Felix. But the doubt is left—the same old wearying horrible doubt, whether my affliction, my broken life is sent, not in love, after all, but in punishment."

A smile stole over Father Humphreys's face, and his answer seemed irrelevant, even frivolous.

"Have you never heard the story of the king and the beggar maid?" he asked.

Percivale dropped his head again, without reply. He looked to have been seeking comfort, and disappointed. Still smiling, Father Humphreys went on.

"Once there was a king, who chose for his wife, not a princess, a woman of his own rank, but a beggar maid who had absolutely nothing except her beauty to recommend her. She hadn't even a decent dress, but came to him in rags. So it fell out that everything needful for her new exalted rank had to be given her by the king. And being a thorough man, the king revelled in doing it. He took her away to the royal chambers, stripped off her rags with his own royal hands and clothed her in queenly robes of cloth of gold. Then he loaded her with jewels, presents, honours and possessions, and married her. In due time, they had children and nothing was wanting to their perfect happiness. They appeared to be the most loving couple on earth. At last, the king's love assumed extraordinary proportions, and he longed to see if she would suffer for him, from him. That is the great test of love, you see. It's easy enough to love until we have to suffer for our beloved. The heathen can do the first. But the hardest thing of all is to suffer at the hands of our lover. Well, the king was certain that she did love him well enough to suffer anything *from him*, without mistrust, but, all the same, he longed to see her actually doing it. So he began to treat her unkindly. First, he

pretended not to love her. But she didn't believe him. Then he took away her honours and possessions and made her an object of scorn to men. After that, she was deprived of her children, and finally, her royal robes were taken away, she was clothed again in beggar's rags, and turned from the palace door, outcast on the world. But she never faltered. She loved her husband to the very end. Even as she turned away from the gates, she looked up at his window where he was standing, watching her, and kissed her hand to him for the last time. Then the king prepared the last searching trial. He had her fetched back and told her to prepare the wedding garments, and the marriage feast for another bride, since she herself was no longer his wife. She did even that, still loving him, still trusting him in the dark, still obstinately believing, against all reason, that he loved her. And when the preparations were ready, he came, alone, into the chamber, stripped off her rags again, clothed her once more in the royal vesture, and told her why it had all been done. And her whole soul rejoiced with him to think that she had never doubted his love, that all the time, she was his dearest, and that now, because of her colossal trust, she was immeasurably dearer to him than before she had been tried. And, from that day onwards, for ever, the king's love for her was without limit and without measure."

There was a long pause.

Then Percivale raised his head and I saw that the last demon was exorcised.

"Thank you, Felix. I think I see . . . if I dare to look so high."

"You must dare," answered the priest, gently. "Don't think of *yourself*. It isn't every soul whom the King would dare to treat so. They wouldn't stand the test. Their love and trust would fail. Think what it is *to Him* to get souls who can love like that, through every trial. We mustn't think of ourselves—only of Him, as you did that first day."

CHAPTER XVII

THE COMING OF LOVE

THEN at last came the day when I met my fate.

Utterly unconscious of the tremendous importance of its passing hours, I had spent them in a less interesting way than usual. And, at evening, I went out for a lonely stroll before supper, reflecting, as I walked, upon Father Humphreys's near departure from Blackcombe. The next day would be his last. And a week later, I too, should have to go. Already my three months had stretched themselves into over four and the boys were getting absolutely clamorous at this prolonged absence which I explained by saying that my book wasn't finished. This was true. It had received scant attention since July.

A sense of deep sadness possessed me. I was almost alarmed to find how I had become bound up in Blackcombe, or to be strictly truthful, in Percivale. I was wretched at the thought of parting from him. I could not bear to think of life without the constant contemplation of his life beside me. Fate seemed so to have interwoven their threads that separation would mean destruction. If I had been wiser that evening, I might have known that this feeling alone was the

pledge of life-long union between us. But I was still a foolish virgin and my heart ached unbearably at the thought of leaving Percivale alone for the winter. I knew what I was to him. I almost knew what he was to me. Neither for his sake, nor my own could I bear to go.

Then, too, I was full of sorrow about the parting from Father Humphreys. In some ways, he attracted me even more than Percivale. It fascinated me, the absolute sunniness of his character, reared from childhood in the sheltered garden of the Church. His was obviously a nature which had never known sorrow or temptation: a nature which was literally childlike in its beautiful ideal of unclouded love. His joy in life, in all things supernatural and natural, his attitude towards God, appealed to my own nature more strongly than did the way of pain—probably because of its greater rarity. It is easier to spiritualise pain than it is to supernaturalise happiness. I loved the way in which he saw the divine everywhere. He could not understand half measures. For him, God was everywhere, or nowhere. God had made everything, or nothing. And besides this, I loved the suggestion of unfathomable depths, the sudden glimpses of the man, which I saw, now and then, in this innocent soul. For instance, how manly and how priestly he had looked that day in the ruins, kneeling bareheaded by Percivale, asking to be hated. How on earth did the wise child know that it would exorcise the demon of hatred quicker, more effectually than volumes of words? Surely, he could never have deeply hated, never have had an enemy in the whole of his short, sunny life? Yet was it possible

for such knowledge of human nature to be merely abstract, theoretical?

Then my thoughts wandered to the story of the king and the beggar maid and I revolved it, in my mind, from the purely human standpoint. I wondered if any man could behave in such a way to his wife, loving her devotedly, all the time. To me, it seemed impossible. I could understand the story well from her side, but not from his. It was easy for her to believe in him and love him to the end—comparatively easy, at least. The frightfully hard thing was his side—the inflicting of pain on his beloved. My instinct would be to shield my loved one from the slightest pain, and never myself to inflict it. But, after all, was this the highest love? I sat down at the brow of the hill and buried my face in my hands. It was a lovely evening; sunset was over, though the afterglow was still bright in the west, and a silver crescent moon, in all her virginal young beauty, glided down the love-red sky after her sire, the sun.

Was this the highest love, this dread of inflicting pain? According to conventional human standards, yes. But what about the divine? Did not God inflict the keenest sorrow upon the souls He best loved? I rose, with a sigh, and caught sight of something which drove every other thought clean out of my head.

The road was an exceptionally winding one and I was then almost at its highest point among the hills, two facts which enabled me to see a long distance ahead. I was at the top of one hill and on the opposite one, a mile or so ahead, a cyclist was racing

at breakneck speed. Anxiously, I watched the descent, till the top of my hill hid it from view. I knew if he or she did not reach me within ten minutes that it would behove me to descend and see if anything had gone wrong. Even before it passed out of sight, I had seen that the speed was terrific, and that the machine swayed violently as though losing balance; and I knew that there was a bad curve at the bottom where a little bridge spanned a rushing stream. At once I started off to walk quickly towards the spot. Then, with a growing sense of disaster, I began to run, my pace increasing as I neared the bottom, for no one appeared. When I reached the bridge, the sight of a mangled bicycle gave me a thrill of horror. In fact, I dreaded to round the curve for fear of the sight which might be awaiting me. But, with a great effort, I forced my trembling knees to continue their work till they brought me to the side of a motionless figure under the bank. It was a man—a gentleman unmistakably—young, strong, large, fair—and probably dead or dying. He was lying, face downwards with his right arm under him, and I sickened to see a dark trickle of blood creeping down the white road from the fair head. His face, I couldn't see, of course, and I dreaded to turn him over lest he should be disfigured. But it was imperative that something should be done at once, to ascertain the extent of the injury, as far as any amateur could. Oh, how I prayed that Dr. Randal might come along! Never in my life have I prayed for anything as I did for that. Meantime, there I was alone, among the hills, in growing darkness, with an injured man dependent on my nerve for his life.

With an effort I rolled him over, and the sight was pitiful. From the moment that I first saw his face, fear fled, driven out by overwhelming pity. The blood was running from a cut on the forehead and his lips also were wet with blood. I ran to the stream, soaked my handkerchief and brought it back, dripping. First, I bathed the parted lips and, as the blood did not return, to my relief, I realised that it was probably due only to a jarred tooth caused by the blow of the fall. The cut on the temple was another thing. I washed the blood away several times but it still flowed rapidly, though I kept it away long enough to see exactly the extent and shape of the gash. How in the world did surgeons check hæmorrhage from any part of the head, I wondered despairingly? One couldn't tie between the heart and the wound without doing it round the neck and throttling him. First, I tried binding the wet handkerchief tightly round his temples, but this was, of course, no use. To stop the blood at its source, or else to plaster up its outlet, were the only two possible remedies. Having failed in the first, I made several ineffectual attempts for the second. In vain, I longed for flour, spider's webs, dough, plaster, any and everything my harassed memory could recall as having been used for the accidents of nursery days. At last, it seemed as if the only remedy was to pull the edges of the skin together with my fingers, joining them as well as I could, and hold them as tightly as possible. If my patient had been conscious, no doubt this method would have hurt him badly. But, as he wasn't, nothing mattered. To my relief, the blood almost entirely

ceased to flow, by the time I had held the wound a few seconds. Then another, or rather, two awful ideas occurred to me. The first was, was the man already dead? The next was, how long could I maintain such an attitude while waiting for the first chance passer-by to come along? In five minutes, my fingers and wrists began to ache, and it was a lonely road and a time of day when most farm hands had gone home. I did not dare to let go my hold, so I leant over the unconscious form and placed my ear right on the parted lips, listening for the sound of breathing. In a few seconds, I thought I felt a warm glow, though I could hear nothing. I waited but it was too indefinite. At last, by twisting my legs under me, and wriggling along to the length of my own arms' tether, I managed to lay my head over his heart. Yes, to my unutterable relief, there was a steady thumping. Strained though I was, I remained for several seconds, listening. It was the first time in my life I had ever heard the mysterious almost uncanny sound of the human heart and it affected me profoundly. I listened and wondered: wondered who this man was, if he would die, if he were married and if some other woman's head had ever lain where mine was, listening, gladly, to that mysterious throbbing. Then I raised myself and looked at him. It was still light enough to see quite clearly. As I have already said, he was large, strong, young and fair. His clean-shaven face was, then, of course, pale, though one could still see a shade of sunburn above the unnatural pallor. His eyes were closed, and the long lashes lay above dark shadows under the lower eyelids. The injured right arm was

lying beside him, but the left one, either by the violence of the fall or in rolling over afterwards, was thrown out to its widest extent as though mutely imploring help. Altogether, it was the most pathetic sight I had ever seen, this strong man made suddenly weaker than an infant and entirely at my mercy.

At last, I decided to shout for help. There were fields not far away and sound travelled an immense distance in such still air. I scrambled to my knees and shouted with all my might "Help, help, help." The noise I made was enough to raise the dead, but my patient never stirred. I kept it up for five minutes, then paused for breath, only to begin again as soon as possible. After what seemed like eternities, I heard an answering shout. The relief was such that I nearly burst out crying. Instead, however, I sent back a volley of yells which resulted in the sight of a twinkling light. The large yellow flame bobbed and danced across the dark land at a great pace towards us.

"Has will-o'-the-wisp taken pity on us?" I exclaimed aloud. I felt almost light-headed. "Oh, it's Warren, the trapper."

It was. He approached with expressions of horror and sympathy. I knew the man well, having often seen him about the hills at dusk, attending to his snares.

"Fly, as hard as you can go, for Dr. Randal," I gasped. "Tell him a gentleman has hurt his head badly and is bleeding. Don't waste a minute stopping anywhere, will you? Then, after you have started the doctor off, go back to Halsanger and

tell Mrs. Pearn to get my bedroom ready for him. It's the nearest house, and she can air another bed for me later. You won't waste a minute, will you?" I pleaded. "I don't know how much longer I can hang on. Have you got any spirits with you?"

"No, wuss luck," he answered, with fervour. "Cold tea's more my line than t'other. 'Tis a wisht old job, sure 'nough, for you, Miss, but you'm a brave maid. Will you go for doctor, and let me bide with 'en?"

"No, no," I cried, with an energy that amazed myself. "I wouldn't leave him for anything. Make haste, do. Can you leave me your lantern? And have you got matches, in case it goes out? Thank you. Oh, do make haste!"

He hurried off, incoherent with sympathy, and I listened to the beat of his heavy boots along the road till the sound died away in silence. Then once more, I was alone and it was quite dark except for the starlight. The shy little moon gave us no help whatever. My hands ached unbearably and were so stiff that I could hardly move them. But the blood had quite stopped. Then it suddenly occurred to me that Warren had unconsciously left me a splendid plaster in the shape of his candle. Cautiously letting go with one hand, I turned the light full on the unconscious face. No, the bleeding did not begin again. I drew back my other hand and watched closely. The flesh seemed to have closed itself. With a sigh of relief, I warmed my stiffened fingers at the flame, then took out the candle and dripped a pool of melted wax into the hollow of my left hand. I kneaded it till it was nearly set and then care-

fully placed it along the cut, to keep the edges together.

For a short time, I rejoiced. It was worth anything to have stopped the bleeding and to be able to stretch my cramped muscles. I stamped up and down the road, and beat my hands together till I was thoroughly warm. Then I returned to my patient, to find, to my horror, that he was deadly cold.

Sickness had never come, very much, my way. But I had read and heard enough to know that a stage called reaction followed shock, especially if there had been loss of blood. I snatched up my heavy golf cloak, which had been lying beside me, and spread it over him. Then I took the lantern and ran to his broken bicycle to see if he had got a kit-bag with him. But there was nothing. Evidently, he had only been coming in for a short time, or else was an expected guest somewhere where his host would lend him necessaries. Or again, his luggage might have been fetched from the station while he preferred to cycle. I ran back to him, took off my warm tweed skirt and added that to the cloak. Then I chafed his cold hands gently, and held them between my warm ones. But he seemed to grow colder and his heart when I listened again, was slower, fainter, less regular. So I had saved him from one death, only to see him die another.

I stood up and stretched my impotent arms out to the star-gemmed sky. Somehow, the gesture, begun in despair, ended in a sudden rising of all my courage.

"You shan't die!" I exclaimed, kneeling down

beside the cold, still figure. "I am young and strong and so are you, and I will fight death inch by inch and conquer, if I have to get my own life into you to do it. Nothing but artificial heat will save you now, and there is only one way to give you that."

I slipped down beside him, got my arms round him somehow, pressed myself close against him, and, with one hand, drew the wraps up entirely over my own head, leaving his free. Breathing was, of course, difficult. But it was possible and the heat generated by my warm breath was amazing. In a few minutes I myself was almost red hot and I could feel that he was slightly warmer. I hung on, half stifled, till my cheeks began to burn. At last I could feel that even his hands were getting warm, and once I heard a slight sigh.

"Oh, for mercy's sake, don't come to yet," I gasped, wriggling my head out for a few draughts of the cool night air. "This desperate remedy is only possible while you are unconscious. I could never tell even Dr. Randal. It will be a secret between me and God. He understands."

I drew in again, and felt his pulse. It was much stronger. So then I knew I had done all that human power could do, and that God would give me the victory. All at once, I felt a steadying of my strained nerves, a conviction of some divine nearness and help.

I lay there, quietly, and it seemed to me as it thousands of years were passing. My past life, even such recent experiences as the first Mass, looked like events of a former existence. All my being, my

universe, was centred in this desperate reality, this poor, weak, strong man whose life I was saving with my own.

It seemed to me that he was mine, altogether mine. I no longer wondered if he had a wife or a sweetheart. The idea would have struck me, then, as preposterous. He was mine and my whole heart went out to him, as I clung to him alone there, under the stars.

At last, I heard the sound of wheels and the rapid beating of horses' hoofs upon the road. I flung off the wraps, and hastily put on my skirt again. In a few minutes, the carriage drew up beside me and the lamps revealed Dr. Randal, leaping out with his bag in his hand. Suddenly, I gave way. The relief of his strong presence, the extraordinary strain I had been enduring, brought the tears at last.

"Cry away, wise child," he said, composedly. "It's the best thing you can do, as you know. Jove! the poor beggar's as warm as I am, and he ought to be in collapse by now. And what's this plaster? Candle wax? Phyllis, you witch, you brave, wise child, you are worth your weight in gold. Soon, you must tell me how you did it all."

In a few seconds, he had deftly made an injection in the left arm: then handled him skilfully all over.

"So! Now, to get him in."

This was quickly done by the doctor and the coachman, I standing at the horses' heads.

"Now, Phyllis. You won't mind the back seat for once. You can keep an eye on his legs while I support his head. Right! Home."

"No, no," I exclaimed, horror-stricken. "I've

arranged for him to go to Halsanger. He can have my room. We know that's aired. Surely, it's a better arrangement than you having him with Mrs. Randal so delicate? Mrs. Pearn, Susan, and I are as strong as oxen, and, if necessary, there is room for a trained nurse later."

I could see a keen glance flashed at me in the lamplight.

"Very well. Yes, it is better. And that's the true professional instinct, Phyllis: never give up your patient to anyone. Stop at Halsanger, then, Jacobs."

We reached the farm without mishap, though the patient was still unconscious. Mrs. Pearn was fully prepared for the worst, and entered into the business with zest. She and the doctor soon had the sufferer safe in bed, after which a full examination was made.

"He has broken his right wrist and the knock on the temple may lead to complications. The sustained unconsciousness is not a good sign. But there is no other injury, and he's got a splendid constitution and is in tip-top condition—a clean and temperate liver. That's half the battle. You may go in and look at him."

With a beating heart, I entered my room and walked up to the bed. The injured head was now neatly plastered, and the arm swathed in white bandages. So far, I had saved him.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FIRST CONFESSION

As I stood gazing, a strong arm encircled me and drew me, with gentle violence, from the room—my room.

"Now, my brave little Phyllis, I don't intend to have another patient on my hands. Besides, I want you as a nurse to-morrow. You have been splendid, little girl. Later, you must tell me how you managed, and especially how you kept him warm."

I felt myself blushing so hotly that I was thankful my guilty face was hidden against the doctor's broad shoulder.

"You will go straight off to your new room, have a hot bath—Susan has got everything ready for you—afterwards downstairs, where supper will be waiting in half an hour, and then to bed."

"To bed!" I echoed, in dismay, drawing away from him. "Why, I thought you would want me to sit up to-night?"

"I am going to sit up to-night. The case is not one to be left at present. And I can't spare to-morrow from my other patients. That is when you will be invaluable to me . . . provided you are rested. Remember, child, you have had a nasty shock and

a prolonged strain—things you are not seasoned to, as I am. And you have done so well that we mustn't spoil the record. You will find a glass of wine downstairs, which I wish you to drink before you try to eat anything. You understand? Then you may continue with hot soup, cold chicken and junket. Mrs. Pearn is one brick, and Susan is another. Take as much wine as you like with your supper, after my glass. Will you do as I ask? You don't feel unable to eat?" he asked, eyeing me keenly.

"I haven't thought about it," I answered, vaguely. "But no. I'm sure I am all right, and I will do exactly what you tell me to."

I did. And either there was some magic potion in the wine, or else it acted as a sedative upon my abstemious head, for I was asleep as soon as I got into bed, and slept dreamlessly until dawn.

Then I woke with a start and looked at my watch which, however, I had forgotten to wind. But I could judge by the light, that it must be about five o'clock. I lay down again and listened. There were no sounds yet in the house or about the farmyard and silence also reigned from my room. My brain began to work furiously and I soon found it impossible to lie still, so I rose and dressed, making as little noise as possible. Cautiously opening my door which seemed, to my overstrung nerves, to crack as though newly-painted, I stole out on the landing and held my breath to listen outside the sick-room. There was no sound whatever. My heart beat like a hammer, and once I even had my hand on the latch, so great was my craving to enter. Prudence,

however, restrained me and I descended the white wooden stairs, carrying my shoes. In the kitchen I found Susan. She was just pouring out three cups of tea.

"You'm just in time, Miss. 'Tis early yet for you. Us haven't heard a word about the poor gentleman. Doctor's been all to himself all night. I reckon he'll soon be down, now."

I stood, drinking my tea and looking enviously at Susan's bright face and hair. I dared not give rein to my thoughts or put them into words, even to myself. Instead, I asked a question.

"Do you think—did the doctor say there was any danger or likely to be?" I faltered. "And when would the bad stage be?"

Susan put down the tea-pot and gazed at me reflectively out of her placid brown eyes.

"I don't know, exactly, Miss. Mother saw doctor about eleven o'clock when he sent us to bed. He said then 'It will be decided by morning.' But he didn't exactly say if there was any danger."

I put down my cup and went out. The house seemed to stifle me, and I felt I must be alone to confront my strange new self.

Mechanically, I walked down to the chapel. It was still too early for Mass, but I knew that the priests were always there an hour before the service engaged in their own private devotions.

I looked at the radiant east, the sparkling sea, the golden harvest fields, at the glad, good world, and my heart felt as cold, and heavy and grey as lead. The glory of nature seemed to mock me. What had happened to me since yesterday's sunrise?

As I had expected, the chapel door was open. I went in. Father Humphreys was there and looked round as I entered. Then he got up and came quickly forward to greet me, drawing me gently outside into the sunshine.

"How are you, how are you?" he asked, with an air of such solicitude that it nearly did for me. "Percivale and I have been desperately anxious to know. Are you any the worse? What a shock for you. And how is the patient?"

"I don't know," I replied, choking down a sob. "I am far more anxious to know that than you are. For myself, I am all right, except——" I broke off, disgusted. But he was too quick for me.

"Except what?"

"I don't know. Nothing. I am stupid this morning. I am quite all right. There isn't any except. I wasn't thinking. And to be offensively frank, I came down here to be quiet and think," I added, ungratefully.

He dropped my hand at once, but didn't seem a bit hurt.

"Of course. Do stay as long as you like, and let us know if there is anything whatever that we can do for you. Let us come up and sit with you if you are anxious—anything."

I thanked him huskily and bolted into the chapel, glad to hide my face. He followed and soon became lost in prayer.

Then I faced my new self, and gave my thoughts their head. And the result was such that I felt I must have sympathy or go mad. I looked round at the priest. He was kneeling in his favourite

attitude with head raised, eyes closed and arms folded across his breast. I watched, remembering my impressions that first morning and how I had speculated about the secrets hidden behind the broad, white brow. The thought was like a sheet anchor. Hitherto, I had been helplessly drifting through a raging sea. Now, I had got something strong to pull on. Confession—that was the thing. I never stopped to think what my sins were, whether I had sinned, if I wanted forgiveness. My craving was to put my misery into words to a man who would not be shocked or misunderstand.

I got up from my knees, went over, and ruthlessly disturbed his prayer.

"Father, excuse me for disturbing you, but I must talk to you or burst."

Why a vulgarism of the boys should have escaped from me at such a moment, I don't know. Still less do I know why Father Humphreys received it as composedly as if it had been classical English.

"May I talk in here? Does it matter?"

"Not a bit," he answered, rising from his knees and motioning me to sit down. "There is no one to be disturbed. I see you are troubled. Do tell me all. Surely, we are friends enough for that, by now. Mayn't I share your troubles? You wouldn't like it if I didn't let you share mine, you know," he added, with a slight smile.

"Thank you awfully," I gasped out, as he sat down on the bench in front of me and turned so that only his side face was visible. I didn't know then that this was the attitude assumed by priests when hearing confessions. Perhaps if I had, it would

have terrified me. I only felt dimly, that it was nice to have him so near, yet not actually looking at me.

"It's about the accident," he began, gently, by way of helping me to be coherent. "Tell me exactly what troubles you."

So then and there I blurted out the story of finding the wounded man and of my various ministrations. Several times, he murmured "Yes," as a sort of soothing commentary which didn't interrupt and yet gave me courage to continue. And though I had vowed, only the night before, never to tell a living being the whole story, I found myself actually describing, with tears, the last desperate resource by which I had saved the failing life.

"I'm not ashamed, you understand, Father. I would do it again to-day. At least, I am not ashamed as long as he never knows. If he did, I should die. But I know you will never tell. The thing which worries me is just that—that I am not ashamed. Do you understand?"

He was too wise to hazard a reply. Whether or not he understood, he remained silent, with bent head and closed eyes. I made a frantic effort after coherency and went on.

"As long as he never knows my secret, I am not ashamed and I'm afraid I ought to be. You see, the whole truth is this: I love him."

I paused again, this time blushing furiously, to see the effect of this audacious statement.

To my relief, Father Humphreys did not even open his eyes. He simply murmured another soothing "Yes" and waited. Without a moment's warning, I burst out crying.

"Oh Father, aren't you shocked? Do, do treat me as if I were a Catholic going to confession properly. Don't make allowances for me or judge me by a different standard. Aren't you shocked at a girl who is in love with a man who has never even spoken to her or looked at her? A man who may be married or in love with someone else?"

This time, his eyes did open—it seemed to me, in astonishment.

"Shocked? No, of course not. On the contrary, it would be a very remarkable thing if, in the circumstances, you were *not* in love with him."

I gasped. Then gathered courage and finally poured out all my trouble.

"Thank Heaven, you do understand. I have often wondered what it felt like to be in love and now I know, with a vengeance. I wish I didn't. And yet, I wouldn't be without the pain for anything. It's so contradictory. It is sheer agony and yet I feel as if I should die if the pain were to stop. It seemed to begin when I first turned him over and looked at his face. The poor, silent, blood-stained lips were so pathetic, and then his arm was stretched out as if appealing to me to save him. But the thing which finished me was listening to his heart. If I had known, nothing would have induced me to do it. I didn't realise it at the time, you understand. There wasn't time to think about myself at all, at first And then, when I got under the cloak with him, and clung to him for dear life, breathing my breath of life into him almost, I felt as if he were absolutely mine, as if God had given him to me. Otherwise, why should I have been the one to find him? I

didn't know I was going to, when I started for the walk. I didn't know what would be the result of saving him. I did it all so innocently, and because bit by bit it was forced on me."

At this point, I broke off, silenced by tears. But I soon mastered them and went on.

"But if it was all innocently done at first, is it innocent now? I can't feel guilty and yet that worries me worst of all, because I feel I ought to be ashamed of loving a man of whom I know nothing, not even his name. And yet, when once love has come into existence, surely it isn't possible to kill it? And then again, I wondered if it is really love or only pity and natural emotion, the result of all I had to do for him. But I am certain I shouldn't have felt like it with anyone else. I didn't clearly realise the whole truth until I went in and saw him safe in bed last night. And then I knew that whether or not he ever loves me or ever can belong to me, I shall love him till death, and after. I feel as if my very dust would thrill at his footstep."

I hid my wet face in my handkerchief and waited for the verdict. It was a little time in coming, but he spoke at last.

"Don't be troubled, my child. There is no guilt anywhere. And it rests with you, thank God, that there never will be. We will take the thing at its very worst. If this man is already married or pledged to another woman, your love for him, is and always must be, too great to wrong him by a thought or a desire. The very greatness of the love will save you, and it must be your own secret, known only to God and me. Never let your love fall from its high

estate. It must be his Angel guardian, shielding him, with its white wings, from all breath of harm. But I must say plainly that never, in my experience, have I seen an instance of true love which didn't obtain fruition before the end of life. You must have heard that such things do happen, and, in some cases, as innocently as it has happened to you. Men and women fall in love with each other, when one or other isn't free to marry. If it is true love, no harm comes. If it is less than love, it results in three wrecked lives. But I know by experience, and I believe most firmly, that, where the love is innocent, God rights it in His own good time. Why He permits it to awaken before what we poor mortals think is its due time, I don't know. Perhaps it is to try it and make it more precious, when attainment comes. Be at peace, my child. Don't torture your sensitive soul with thoughts of guilt. Keep your secret bravely and trust in God. If your lover is beyond your reach now, he will not be always. God wouldn't have let this love awaken, or given you that conviction of last night, merely to mock you. Trust to that conviction which came to you, while you were saving his life. God cannot fail you, or mock you or let you displease Him, against your will, and without your knowledge. Trust Him, as you would trust your human friend or lover. It will come right in the end. We are too prone to picture God as a Being who is always taking offence where none is intended. We don't realise that even a human lover would not do this. How much less can God!"

I rose to my feet, almost heart-broken with gratitude.

"By the way," he added, rising also, "this is not a sacramental confession but I shall take it as *sub sigillo.* That means, I shall never, of course, divulge a word of it to anyone, and shall not even be able to mention it to you yourself, unless you give me permission to."

Again I thanked him, and passed out into the growing sunshine with a dumb prayer that God would reward this man, and comfort him when his day of trouble should come, even as he had comforted me. The anguish of love was still with me, but the balm of peace had been poured into the open wound. Even if my beloved could never take my love, never even know of it, the precious thing was mine and would cherish him to the end of the life which I had saved.

Dr. Randal came to meet me at the farmhouse door. Directly I saw him, I knew that all was well, and his cheery words were the sweetest music I ever heard in my life.

"Well, brave child, your work has been blessed. I can't say there ever was any real danger, only the chance of concussion of the brain which would not have been serious, even if it had come on. But that is all over now. We have had a little chat, and I am writing a couple of letters for him. He is making a tour through North Devon and was cycling over from Seaford, intending to return the same evening, to inquire the hour of the Mass here next Sunday."

"Mass?" I interrupted. "Is he a Catholic, then?"

"Yes; otherwise, he wouldn't have been hunting

up Blackcombe. The place doesn't possess any attractions to the ordinary visitor. But he heard from the *padre* at Seaford about the chapel and so on and liked the story. I fancy Douglas is the attraction. Already, he has asked more questions about him than I can answer. If all goes well, I shall let him see him to-morrow. There will be no peace till he has. I shall see Percivale this morning. Well, as far as the head goes, he need only be kept quiet for two or three days. But the wrist, of course, will be a question of some weeks. Still, that won't keep him in bed or indoors, either. At the moment, he is asleep, with Mrs. Pearn in attendance. And I want you to take charge. There is nothing to do but to watch him and give him nourishment when he wakes. Let him take as much as he likes of anything on the list I have left with Mrs. Pearn. I'll look in again after tea. You can manage till then, and she will take the night watch to-night. By the way, don't let him sit up to eat. You must support him on your arm, till his head gets a bit stronger."

I was quivering with excitement and delight, but outwardly, I maintained my composure. Oh, the joy of hearing that he was safe and that I should have sole charge of him for nine blissful hours!

"Have you told him anything about me?" I asked. "Will he wonder who I am and resent my attentions in any way, do you think?"

The doctor laughed. It was a peculiar laugh. For some unknown reason it made me colour, and the look, which accompanied it, caused me to turn my face away in confusion.

"Yes, I plead guilty to telling him a good deal about you. But there is still something which only you can tell and which we are, both of us, aching to hear. I expect, by teatime, he will be quite fit to listen to the story which you shall tell us both together then. Don't be surprised if his gratitude is rather overwhelming at first. He's a strong man, remember, not a callow youth. And it's a masterful character which is clearly, accustomed to carry all before it. By the way, he's a gentleman—a man of means and position. His people are in India, as his father is in an important Government berth out there. Wedderburn himself hasn't been long in England and doesn't appear to have any near relatives over here."

I listened, utterly tongue-tied. Ah, if I could only be told, I thought, whether or not he is free to love me!

As soon as the doctor had departed, I flew to my room and entered noiselessly. The patient didn't move. Panting with emotion, I approached the bed, knelt down beside it and feasted my happy eyes on the now faintly-coloured face, noting, with joy, the deep, steady, audible breathing, so different to the imperceptible flutter of the previous night.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LOVING CUP

I KNELT on and on. There was nothing to do, no one to disturb me. In looking along life's way, we sometimes see best in perspective. The most beautiful spots of the path look their loveliest from a distance. But, for once, I realised my supreme happiness at the actual time of fruition. Kneeling there, in the sunlight of that late August morning, watching the tide of a man's life flow back into every nook of his being, enraptured by the certainty that my hand had stemmed and turned the ebbing tide, this was, I well knew, an experience which could only come once to mortal. I knew it, at the time, and I made the most of the conscious ecstasy.

I breathed every draught of air with him, timing my breathing to his. My greedy fingers pressed the blood-throb in his wrist, and I longed to make my own heart beat in unison with his, but this was beyond my power. My pulse was almost two to his one.

Once more, I gazed at life—life returning as a queen to her own kingdom—life which I had saved by my own life, life which, but for me, would have

gone back to her unknown wonder-world. For the first time, I felt, so far as the finite may feel it, the joy of being a creator, and then, at last, I understood the love of the mother for her child—her love of that unconscious life which, under God, is so entirely dependent upon hers. This strong man had roused the deepest love in a woman's heart—the instinct of motherhood.

One marvellous, yet wholly real, vision opened out before me, and the heart of the joy was my love. With renewed certainty, I knew as I knelt there, that if this man might not be my husband, I should never have another. And, on this point, peace had come. My love was a holy thing. Unless I myself defaced and defiled it, it would remain for ever holy. It was the white flower of my life, blossoming secretly, with unstained petals in my heart: it was the guardian angel of his life and would shield him from all harm to the very end.

This thought, of course, recalled Father Humphreys, and at once came another vision—the vision of the priest's white soul. As I dwelt on his gentleness, his instant comprehension, the unutterable delicacy with which he had touched and healed my soul-wound, the grateful tears again filled my eyes. I had knelt, trembling, at his feet for judgment; and had received, not pardon, for according to him, none was needed: not condemnation: nothing but light, strength, peace. Were all priests like him, I wondered? Would they each and all have so understood that sensitive thing, a young woman in love, a soul trembling at the possibility of an unholy passion? Must not this man have been in love

himself, or could his apparently personal knowledge have come only from witnessing other peoples? Did priests ever love women, or was it possible that such tenderness could spring from Divine love alone?

I pondered long on the fascinating mystery, and then tried to decide what would have been my fate if he had condemned me. That effort showed me the wisdom of his words, besides their tenderness. If he had told me my love was a guilty thing, and had ordered me to tear it out of my heart, my whole nature would have risen in revolt at the injustice of God Who had sent to me, innocent and unconscious as I was, a thing which was beyond my power to kill. If I had been told to believe that God had broken my heart and blackened my soul with guilt, without my consent, almost without my knowledge, I should have either hated Him, or ceased to believe in Him. I shuddered as I realised the responsibility which had rested on the priest when making his decision. An immortal soul had been standing on a narrow plank between Heaven and Hell, that morning. Poor priests! Poor, frail, strong manhood, upon which such burdens rest! How they must feel their own weakness! No wonder they pray, soak themselves in the saint-lore of the Divine Office, drain daily the Blood of Sacrifice, hold Communion heart to heart with their God! No wonder their Church anoints and consecrates them by a special Sacrament, seals their trembling souls with an ineffaceable character which gives a lifelong grace in every need! No wonder Catholics love their priests!

I gazed so long at this enthralling vision of a

normal priest's soul—the vision which my white-handed saint could never show me, and for which I had longed when Father Humphreys first came—that a gentle tap on the door caused me to jump from my knees as though galvanised. It was Susan who had come to tell me that lunch was ready, and to ask where would I have it? Should she sit with the gentleman while I refreshed myself? There was no other alternative. I had grudgingly to admit this. In obedience to Dr. Randal, I must eat, and I couldn't have meals carted up to the sick-room. So I departed, feasting my hungry eyes on my patient to the last, and I can safely say that it was the most rapid meal I ever consumed in my life. Mrs. Pearn, very properly, expostulated.

"Oh, my dear life, Miss Phyllis, you baint finished already. You'll be quite run out. Up since five this morning, and not even changed your dress or done your hair yet. Do 'ee take a half-hour's rest now. Susan baint busy, and the doctor says the poor dear gentleman won't wake till teatime."

This "ower true tale" is not intended to edify. Otherwise I should not record that Mrs. Pearn's words as to my personal appearance suddenly aroused an interest in that question which I had never felt, never even imagined, before. All at once, I became conscious that I had rolled up my hair anyhow, when dressing in the early morning, and that I hadn't yet even taken off my coat. Casting every decent consideration aside, I fled to my room, flung off my coat and dress, dashed into a dressing-gown, and soon had my hair flying in all directions under the united action of two hard brushes. I worked

till I was in a glow and my tresses shone like polished mahogany. Then I plaited them into a rope-like coronet and crowned my head with its own beauty. After this vigorous treatment, the little curls and tendrils over my forehead and round my ears, tightened themselves more than usual. Then I hurried into my white dress, with its blue satin belt and ribbons. Father Humphreys had admired it, once upon a time, and all men adored sky blue, I thought, as I flung on my turquoise chain, snapped the blue bangle and thrust the forget-me-not ring on my right hand. Pale tan shoes and stockings finished me, and then I stood staring at myself in the glass as I had never stared before. All my life, I had regarded my image with placid satisfaction, and had enjoyed all my own good points as I enjoyed all the other pleasures of life. From my childish days I had been accustomed to admiration, so much so that I seldom thought about my appearance. Really good-looking women don't. They have no need to. It is a thing so common as to pass unnoticed by its owner half the day.

But now, things were different. I deliberately counted up my worth. I revelled at my tall lissom figure, and long white strong supple limbs which made every movement a joy: I rejoiced at my brilliant complexion, full red lips, white teeth, eyes as soft as golden-brown velvet crowned by dark arched brows.

But, in extenuation, let me say that it was not for myself I revelled. It was for him who would soon see the saver of his life.

"Phyllis, you are a sweet, beautiful, healthy

woman, lovable from your arched insteps to the crown of your nut-brown head," I exclaimed to myself in the mirror. "And I'm glad, glad, glad, for his sake. If I were a man and had had my life saved by a woman, I should love her to be young, beautiful, gifted, everything that would make her like the princesses in the fairy stories. And if I were that man in the next room, Phyllis, do you know what I should do? I should worship you."

After which crazy speech I had the grace to blush furiously.

Then I stood quite quiet, gazing at myself from the man's point of view. This brought a solemn thought. What if he should love me, should feel towards me as I felt towards him, and should not be free to do so? Ah, what then? I turned aside, sat down, and covered my face with my hands. Alas! suppose I had only saved him to break his heart, fill his life with unsatisfied longing, doom his soul to the anguish my own had suffered? At first, I shrank from the thought. Then my courage and common sense came to my rescue.

"After all," I said, rising, "it isn't my fault, any of it. I can't help having been the one to save him. There is no reason to suppose that he will fall in love with me. He is a sensible strong man, not a romantic imaginative young woman. And even if he does fall in love with me, and isn't free to, well, if he feels what I do, he will welcome the agony."

Nevertheless, it was with slow steps that I returned to the sick-room. Dismissing Susan, I sat down in a low chair near the bed and waited. It was extraordinary how I longed to hear his voice, to meet

the first look of his eyes. How strange it was to love a man who had never spoken to me or looked at me.

I stared at the sleeping face till my eyelids drooped. Susan had softly drawn down the blinds, so the room was restfully shaded, even though still quite light. A large bee was droning contentedly on the sunny window pane. The conditions were soporific, and the invalid's sleep infectious. I succumbed and disgracefully slumbered on duty. My nap could only have lasted ten minutes or so, and then I awakened, with a violent start, to see a pair of piercing blue eyes staring at me from the pillow. For a few seconds, my confusion was so great, and the gaze was so compelling that I sat still staring back, mesmerised. This was the very last kind of first look which I had ever imagined. He had had the advantage. My first look at him had been while he was unconscious. His at me, the same. Yet for his unconsciousness, there had been excuse. For mine, there was none. Crimson with embarrassment and vexation, I met the look, such a look as my amazed eyes had never met before. It was worship. More, it was ownership. He lay regarding me as calmly as though I were his. It was as though our positions were reversed and he had saved my life, not I, his. Dr. Randal's words about masterfulness came confusedly into my mind. Yes, I had met my match at last. This man was no chicken. He would give an immeasurable love to the bride of his heart. But he would be her master. A strange thrill ran through me, as I realised this, a thrill of resentment and joy together. Then I rose and stooped over the bed.

"Have you been long awake? I am disgusted to have been caught napping. It is almost my first experience of sick nursing and I am for ever disgraced. How do you feel?"

"Very well, thank you," he answered, and I thrilled again, this time at the first sound of his voice, which was rich and deep. Voices always mean so much to me. "And please don't reproach yourself. That nap was one of the many kind things you have done for me. It gave me the liberty to gaze. Otherwise, my glances would have had to be limited and stolen. I should imagine, Miss Lambert, that you are never inartistic. But that short, sweet sleep was one of the most artistic things you have ever done."

My spirits rose like quicksilver in a hot sun. My patient was so at ease, his manner as assured as if we had met under normal social conditions. He accepted my presence in his bedroom without comment, not even pointing out its novelty by thanks, which omission was an immense relief. Again, I had dreaded the first reference to the life-saving episode, of which there was none. Instead, he had thanked me whimsically for falling asleep on duty. In the space of these few minutes, I felt no longer a shy, awkward country girl, but a self-possessed woman of the world. And my gratitude was proportionate.

"Thank you, Mr. Wedderburn. Now, my orders are to give you nourishment, and not to let you raise your own head."

"I can't say which of the two will most delight me," he murmured, as I slipped my left arm under

his pillow, and offered him a cup with my right hand. Outwardly, I was as calm as a professional nurse but my heart was thumping loudly, partly from a nervous fear of choking him, partly with joy at feeling him on my arm. He seemed to be a long time drinking the contents of the cup and, in the middle, he stopped short.

"Miss Lambert, there is something not quite right with this potion. Isn't there? Did you prepare it? No? But haven't you tasted it? Surely a well-trained nurse always tastes everything? I am convinced it is too sweet. I can't finish it."

His tone was quite irritable. That, added to my inexperience, made me lose my head. I looked round for a spoon but there wasn't one in the room. Then he completed my embarrassment.

"Please make haste. My head is beginning to swim. Surely, you don't mind tasting it out of the cup, just for once?"

I complied hurriedly, even in my anxiety, rejoicing at placing my lips where his had been. The draught, some delicate preparation of milk, with a little wine in it, was delicious, and I said so, reproachfully.

"Ah, well, no doubt you are right," he said, all trace of irritation and impatience giving place to a serene satisfaction. "Let me finish it."

And not until I saw him take several separate sips, each time placing his lips on a different part of the cup's rim, did I realise how I had been "had"—to use a brotherism. I turned scarlet at the man's audacity. He had scarcely been awake five minutes, had not known me more than three, before he had

exhibited wit and nerve enough to make his first drink "a loving cup" between us. It was a new and dazzling light upon the character of man. To my disgust, I hadn't regained my composure before it was time to lay him down and meet the full gaze of the searching eyes again. This time I forestalled him.

"Please don't be concerned at my fits of flushing," I began, calmly. "I am a fearful blusher and a shocking cry baby. You are rather heavy, you know, and the exertion made me hot, for the moment. I shall get used to it."

"I hope so," he said fervently and with such a twinkle that I felt I had better have held my peace.

I put aside the cup, gently prodded his pillow which had become flattened, and sat down again, in silence. No good nurse ever conversed with her patient, I reflected.

Mine lay still, for some minutes, staring at the blind. Then he looked at me.

"Miss Lambert, is it against orders to have that blind up and the window wide open? I feel a craving for light and air."

Fearing he was feeling faint, I quickly complied with the request, and let a flood of sunshine into the room.

"That's better. Now we can see clearly," I heard him murmur. And, once again, I knew I had been had. I was beginning to feel an unholy yearning to have a brush with this audacious being. Regardless of the consequences, I returned to the bed, stood full in his line of vision, and looked at him critically.

"Yes, now we can see clearly," I echoed. "Is that why you wanted the blind drawn up?"

"Yes," he responded, without hesitation.

"Why didn't you say so, then?" I asked, repressing a desire to laugh.

"It isn't always artistic to say things. Some men even teach that silence is more artistic than all. Supposing I had said, 'Dear goddess, let in the light that I may see you crowned by a fitting halo of that heavenly sunshine upon which, but for your skill and courage, I should never have looked again' —what would you have said?"

"I should have been inartistic enough to revel," I replied, no longer repressing my laughter. "I am so crude as to prefer truth to art."

"Would you really?" he asked eagerly. "Ah, thank you, sweet Phyllis. It's so difficult for a man. He fears to offend if he dares to be honest."

"Honesty will never offend me," I replied, turning away to hide another blush, this time called forth by his unpermitted use of my Christian name. "As I say, truth is best. And I loathe conventions."

"Then we'll strike a bargain," he exclaimed, with energy. "I will always be honest with you if you will with me. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven. And now, the most difficult quarter of an hour of my whole life is over. Phyllis, do you realise its difficulty? Put yourself in my position and think over it. Make yourself a strong man whose life has been saved by a woman—and such a woman. Mind, that adorable doctor and I didn't commune together for nothing this morning. He has given you away wholesale. And realise that the woman is a stranger, according to the conventions, and yet the nearest——"

He broke off, while I wondered. Had he stopped because of a memory, or only from sheer emotion?

I went over to the bed again and took his unhurt left hand between mine, getting a return grip which drove the gold leaves of my forget-me-not ring into my fingers and drew a drop of blood from one.

"I think I understand. And I'm thankful the conventions are buried before you mention other things."

"You feel as I do that the 'other things,' as you call them, are too sacred to be mentioned until all shame is done away with. That's why I thanked Heaven. Because now, I can thank you. From the bottom of a man's heart, I can thank you—may dare, without permission, to call you by your name. Phyllis, beautiful, noble, wise, brave maid I not only thank you and beg God to reward you and bless Him for having made you what you are: I am proud to owe my life to you. The rôle of fool doesn't sit easily upon me. If I'm anything I'm a knave. But I am thankful I was fool enough to attempt that hill with a broken pedal. I only wish the life you saved was better worthy of its saviour."

I couldn't speak. I didn't try to, didn't want to. And he seemed as content with silence as I.

At last, the doctor's voice outside the door made me draw away my hand which had left a tiny blood-stain on the sheet. I hoped it would escape observation. Then Dr. Randal entered, beaming.

"Well, this is divine. Tea, in such circumstances, will be nectar."

"Unless I manage to make it too sweet," I replied, with a demure glance at my patient who started. I

was determined to let him see that all his little ruses were transparent.

"And even better than nectar will be the recitation by Phyllis herself with full details of the thrilling rescue of a certain rash man from death. I'm aching to hear that," said the doctor, with his fingers on the patient's pulse. "That's all right. Any pain anywhere?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply.

"Where?" asked the doctor, his face falling.

"In the heart regions."

The doctor scrabbled for his stethoscope, then stopped short at the expression of his patient's eyes.

"By Jove! You nearly scored that time. And with a confoundedly stale trick too. I must be getting senile. But, you see, after shock and collapse——"

"And lots of more serious things," interrupted Mr. Wedderburn.

"He's been going on like that ever since he woke up," I broke in. "I'm thinking of throwing up the case."

"I should, Phyllis. Good-for-nothing beggar! Ah, here's the nectar. And now for the story."

CHAPTER XX

DESPAIR

BUT, to my surprise and delight, the story was not told that afternoon—nor for many afternoons. Mr. Wedderburn took a strange, firm line. He had decided, he said, that as it concerned him alone, the tale should first be told to him alone, and this on the very spot where it had happened. In vain did the doctor plead. His patient was inexorable. His decision thrilled me. It would be a week before he was fit to drive four miles, and in a week, with such close companionship as circumstances had arranged for us, what might we not have become to each other? A solemn promise was extracted from me not to tell the story except to its hero, until he had heard it himself. And there, the matter dropped.

The patient's progress was marvellous. There had been no real injury to the head, except the exterior cut on the temple which was of no moment after the first evening. The long unconsciousness had saved him from the after-effects of shock, and a broken bone is a comparatively painless injury. It seemed to me that the man's extraordinary vitality compelled recovery. His force of will, and abnormal happiness of disposition were things to triumph over

every set-back. By the next afternoon, he was fit to see Percivale who came by request, after lunch, Father Humphreys having departed in the morning. I met the priest at the farmhouse door, and took him up to introduce him. As we entered the sick-room, I noticed how Mr. Wedderburn raised himself and turned, with an eager gaze, to Percivale.

I, of course, left them at once and they were over an hour together. When the interview was over, I peppered Percivale with questions.

"Yes, I like him uncommonly. He's a fine fellow . . . a splendid fellow. I shan't be surprised if he buys or rents a little place in Blackcombe. He is tired of travelling, and sick of India, and they haven't any fixed home in England, it seems. His father is likely to be another ten years out there before retiring, when he will come to England and look out for a property somewhere. Meantime, Mr. Wedderburn, with I should imagine, plenty of money, is thinking of making a home of his own. And, as I say, it may be here."

I felt as if the storm-cloud was gathering.

"I suppose he is going to be married," I replied, as indifferently as I could.

Percivale gazed at me reflectively, but even his gentle and unsuspicious glance made me change colour. As I blushed, I saw a gleam flash across his face. It looked like sudden enlightenment.

"I think not," he answered, quietly. "He has been most open about all his affairs. And he would have mentioned being engaged, I feel sure. It would have been the most important point of all. No, Phyllis, I think we may assume that he is as fancy-

free as you and I are," he added, with another smile —a smile which, if it had come from anyone else, I should have called sly.

I returned to the sick-room, feeling as if treading on air. Percivale would not have spoken with such certainty unless he had been sure. My thoughts flew back to the look of ownership which I had surprised the previous afternoon. After all, it was no more astonishing that he should have fallen in love with me than it was that I had with him. He had had exaggerated praises sung of me by Dr. Randal before seeing me at all. He would have been told that I was free. And he had had his life saved by me—so, in a manner of speaking, he was master of a ready-made situation by the time we met.

Tea was ready, the sun was shining and we were in for a delicious *tête-à-tête*.

"Now, do, do tell me what you think of my white-handed saint," I pleaded, when I had served him and seen him comfortably settled. My patient was graver than I had yet seen him. "I love that priest with all my heart. I don't think there is anyone in the world——"

I broke off, horrified at the possibilities of the situation, which my unfinished sentence might create. I was declaring myself to be fancy-free, from the matrimonial standpoint.

"Isn't there?" asked Mr. Wedderburn promptly. "Well, I'm not surprised. I won't even go so far as to say I hope one day there may be, because the love one gives to a man like that is a love apart from all others. It is independent of circumstance,

sex, creed, everything. I suppose you would think me a fool if I said that I already love him as much as you do."

"Certainly I should. You couldn't," I replied, hotly. "I defy you or anyone else to. No one knows what he is to me, what he has done for me, or the delicate spiritual understanding which exists between us. I have been with him through the very worst trials of his life, and seen him in the supreme hour of triumph. Moreover, if he weren't a man I shouldn't love and reverence him half as much as I do. No man could feel towards him as a woman does—any more than any man could be to him what I am. There's a difference between sexless love and virginal love, surely. The first is neither natural nor supernatural. It's only a half-love. We are men and women—not angels, thank Heaven—and we love as men and women. Surely to goodness, a woman may love a man because he is a man, without, in the very least, wishing to marry Him. Won't that be the love of Heaven? As I understand the teaching of your Church, sex is to be perpetuated throughout eternity and, to me, it's one of the most magnificent and significant of all doctrines—because it will be independent of marriage. We know there will not be marriage. Yet there will be men and women. Well, don't you see? But of course you do and please don't talk nonsense any more. A man of your type ought to know better."

My patient stared at me with a look I had never before received even from him.

"Oh, Phyllis, Phyllis," he almost groaned. "Take

care, take care." He broke off for a minute, then added: "You wise, wise woman. I didn't know you were a mystic, as well as all other adorable things."

"Neither did I," I replied, severely. "Have some bread and butter and pull yourself together, do. I want to know what you think of Percivale, not what you think of me."

My victim closed his eyes, muttered distressfully and incoherently for several seconds, then reared up and became grave again.

"He is all I hoped to find him," he said, earnestly. "I won't say 'all I expected to find,' because I didn't dare to expect as much as I dared to hope. It was to see him that I came here at all. The priest at Seaford told me of him. There, they call him a saint as you do, but with them it means more than even you mean by it. I'm awfully keen on mysticism. I have seen a lot of the pagan forms of it in the East: and since I was a kid, the Fathers of the desert and that kind of thing always fascinated me. But I never expected to find this thing in real life, in England, at the present day. He's more than fascinating. He is irresistible. Good heavens, what a life! Isn't it time some idle good-for-nothing brute like myself served such a man with his best?"

I took fire from his fire. This time, it was he who coloured red with emotion.

"You aren't quite, quite strong yet, dear patient," I said, rising and gently placing my hand on his forehead. "You won't let the doctor find your temperature up, when he comes, will you?"

"No," he answered, quietly removing my hand from his forehead, and kissing the palm. "This

hand holds my life in the hollow of its palm, will always hold it, any way, as long as it pleases. What a pretty blue ring! Forget-me-nots? Is that from a lover, Phyllis?"

His tone made me quiver, but I affected nonchalance.

"You know it isn't. I shouldn't have a lover without being engaged to him——"

"Wouldn't you?"

"And the left hand wears the engagement ring as you know quite well," I concluded, trying not to blush. "How hot this tea is! Wouldn't you like some more milk to cool it? And it sets me on fire to hear any man talk of Percivale as you talk of him. Tell me, what are you going to do for him?"

"Everything. I shall settle here, for one thing. That will mean a Catholic household because I must have a housekeeper and a string of servants, indoor and out, and I'll take jolly good care they are all red-hot Papists. Then, of course, I shall need a chaplain, if Father Douglas will be sweet enough to let us use his oratory."

I listened, entranced. It sounded like a fairy story. And I admired the delicacy with which he was setting out to do it. Percivale need not necessarily even know that he was being benefited. By not building an oratory of his own, but by asking permission to use the existing one, Mr. Wedderburn would almost make it appear that he was indebted to Percivale. I put down my tea-cup, planted my elbows on my knees, my face in my hands, and thought out the whole golden future.

"Well?" said my patient, at last.

"I thought a woman was always the first to break

silence," I said, sternly. "If you hadn't interrupted, I should have sat like that for another ten minutes."

"But I'm not a writer or a mystic," he pleaded.

"It's a low thing to feel and a still lower thing to say," I said, pouring out another cup of tea. "But I am low. It comes of living exclusively with men. But you don't know how I yearn to hit you —and hit you hard."

"Do, do," he implored. "Only try to hit me harder than you have already, and I shall be rapturous black and blue in half an hour. But tell me first, what was the result of your recent ecstasy or vision."

"I'm afraid *you* will think *me* mad now," I said, apologetically. "At first, I revelled at the thought of the daily consolations of religion it would mean to him, the more or less permanent establishing of his heart's desire, so soon, and on so firm a basis. And then, I wondered if it would be unalloyed bliss."

"Wait," he interrupted. "You haven't given me a hint as to your meaning. But I will tell you what you mean, to show you that your mind and mine, and all other mystical minds are one. You mean you think he may almost regret the disappearance of the hard service, may be sorry that nothing is left to suffer? And also that he may feel being no longer the one lily in the wilderness, the one voice crying aloud to God?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I do mean."

He smiled contentedly.

"Union, union! Now, I'll do what you can't do, poor Phyllis, because you aren't yet a Catholic: I'll set your mind at rest for ever on those points and tell you exactly what he will feel. He would feel

what we should all feel in the circumstances, except for two things; one is that even if he isn't the only one here to give that particular worship, he is and always will be the dearest of Heaven."

"Yes," I whispered, awestruck. "I never thought of that. But will he believe such a thing about himself? It's easy enough for us to believe it of him."

"If he doesn't, the Lord will soon make him. Now for the second point which is bigger. The conditions which are partly created here and which I intend to finish, will enable him to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in his oratory—to light again the sanctuary lamp extinguished 350 years ago. Do you realise what that will mean to him? I don't suppose he has ever even contemplated such a divine possibility. You see this final supreme privilege can't be given for one only, not even for an officiating priest. There must be Mass at regular intervals, and some few externs . . . conditions which his helplessness and poverty and other causes would, probably have prevented his ever contemplating. Well, think what that will mean to him—as nearly as you can. It will more than compensate for the loss of the hard service, and the loss of solitude. The Eucharist is the central point in all creation. All things converge to it, all things reflect it, only our human eyes are too dim to see it always everywhere. More than this, it is God's most complete expression of love, His closest union with us. By it, His whole nature, human and divine, is mixed with ours. We, body and soul, are united to Him, Body, Soul and Divinity, in the Eucharist. Besides being all crea-

tion, it is also all Heaven and all God, till the veil of the species is drawn aside by death and God is shown to us as He is."

I sat still and thought hard.

"Yes, I think I see," I said, at last, choking down a sob. "And oh! it's wonderful, all of it. It's a fairy story. It's more. If I didn't already believe in God, it would make me. And, if you won't be shocked, it has given me an idea of the *gentlemanliness* of the Lord. He looks now to me not only Human, a Man, but a great Gentleman. He let me come to Blackcombe to give poor Percivale his life's ambition. But for me, humanly speaking, the little chapel would never have been built, and—Percivale himself declares that but for me, he never would have persevered. *You* won't misunderstand my repeating such a thing to you. If he hasn't said it to you himself, he will. I can't make him promise not to. Well, I have been allowed to do so much, temporal and spiritual. And isn't it a glorious part of the whole that I should have been led out to save the very life which is going to bring him his crowning joy and confirm his life's work? That last touch is where the gentlemanliness shows so clearly. It's enough to make one cry with gratitude. If only for Percivale's sake, see what it is to me to have saved your life. Do see, won't you?" I pleaded, this time failing to choke down the sob.

"I do see, as far as any third person can," he assured me. "Ah, Phyllis, what a lot more than you knew depended upon your nerve and judgment that evening. It gives one a cold shiver to think how easily you might have failed. I haven't shivered before. But I do now, since I have seen

Father Douglas. From his point of view, supposing you had let me die! I have decided that the day week, the very hour in fact, will find you and me on that fateful spot, alone together. It's only two miles out from here, they tell me. And whatever the weather is, whatever I am like, I am going on Thursday."

The entrance of the doctor ended the conversation. I slipped out and strolled down to the ruins.

I sat there, recalling my first visit there and all that had happened since.

Then suddenly an idea came to me which, momentarily, stopped my heart beats.

Mr. Wedderburn was not married nor thinking of marriage. That was now certain. But, with his love of mysticism, his admiration for Percivale, would it not be natural for him to enter into the closest relationship with both?

What if he should himself become a priest?

The thought was mingled agony and rapture—rapture at the certainty that, in this circumstance, no other woman would ever call him hers—rapture at the delight this would be to Percivale: and agony at my own irreparable loss.

The more I reflected, the more likely the thing seemed. Then another terror came to me—the unlikelihood of any staunch Catholic marrying an outsider. Why had I never adverted to this point before?

Slowly I rose and left the ruins. Their mouldering decay seemed to have entered my life, like a subtle, contagious deadly disease. While sitting encircled by their rotting arms, my beautiful mind-castle had crumbled to pieces.

CHAPTER XXI

THE KISS AT LAST

In due course, the fateful Thursday came—a golden day after three of rain. It was the last day of August and the month went to her death amid a hush of perfect peace. After an early tea, we set out in Dr. Randal's dog-cart, I driving. It had been specially lent for this unique occasion. When we started it was towards sunset and the wind was sound asleep. Speech would have been desecration both to the day and the occasion. We were absolutely silent till I tightened my reins for the last descent.

"That is where you first saw me," said Mr. Wedderburn, pointing to the distant road ahead.

The remark was less a question than the assertion of a fact requiring no confirmation. I made no reply and he did not ask for one.

As he sat, leaning forward, with his eyes fixed on the hill-road, I stole a glance at him. Bandages were discarded in favour of several neat little strips of plaster on the injured temple. These scarcely showed even indoors, for a thick mane of wavy hair almost concealed the injury, while with a peaked cap, drawn down over his eyebrows, the most

searching examination failed to discover even a fag-end of plaster. If it had not been for the sleeve hanging loose from his right shoulder, and the bandaged wrist, there was no trace of that terrible episode to be seen at all.

I pulled up on the bridge and he sprang out. Brownie was the doctor's quietest mare and was well used to standing. Assisted by Mr. Wedderburn, I flung a cloth across her back, and looped the reins over a hawthorn branch growing out of the old stone wall at the roadside.

This done, I turned to him, trembling with nervous excitement. My heart was beating almost to suffocation, and yet the agitation was, somehow, sweeter than the most peaceful composure would have been. Evidently, he noticed something, for he managed to get both my hands into his own left, and looked down on me with such a tenderness in the keen blue eyes as amazed me.

"Sweet maid, my silly fancy was a mistake," he said more tenderly than I had ever heard him speak. "I might have known it would be an ordeal to any gentle lady. Let us get in and drive home again. And you will forgive me for causing you this agitation?"

"No, no," I exclaimed, nestling my hands closer into the shelter of his. "I love it. It's that, that makes me palpitate. But as I am such a cry-baby, probably I shall cry. Remember, I haven't been here since—and eternities seem to have been compressed into this week."

"Eternities," he acquiesced. "Pledge of more and longer eternities to come. Phyllis, your story,

I strongly suspect, won't be the whole truth unless I say what I have to say first. The last barrier must be down between us, before you tell me how you saved my life. Such a story is not going to be spoilt by conventions. It must be told with your bare soul to mine. Come here."

Trembling now with a vengeance, I followed him, or rather was led by him, to the exact spot where he had fallen and dyed the white granite road with his blood.

Still holding my hands, he laid them against his breast, pressing them there so tightly that I could feel the tremendous thumping of his heart. Then he looked down at me with a smile.

"You see, I remember something. This was where I came off. I remember the crash of my hand and head against that wall, and the lighting of a myriad stars which vanished suddenly into blackness. This was where you found me. But before you tell me how you saved me, let me make sure that the last barrier is down."

For a few seconds we stood so still that an inquisitive robin perched on the handrail of the bridge and stared at us with his big bright eyes. The little torrent laughed and murmured as she rippled on to the sea, and the sinking sun caressed us from head to foot with golden kisses.

At last he spoke—softly and gravely.

"Phyllis, perhaps I shall surprise you. Perhaps you have often pictured to yourself being asked the divine old question 'Do you love me?' But that isn't the question I want to ask. I know you love me."

Flashes of fire seemed to be playing round me,

dazzling my eyes, heating my very blood. What had suddenly happened to the serene sun? The world was on fire.

"I know you love me. And I know I love you. Which pearl of knowledge is the more priceless, I can't, for the life of me, decide. But what I want to ask is this; do you know that I love you?"

Had ever a maid a stranger wooing. I don't know. But this I know—that never a maid had one more entirely after her own heart.

His faith in my love, his certainty of it, was the thing that turned my life to fire, and light. He had no need even of confirmation. With reverent but resistless hand, he had gently unveiled my heart, gazed with reverent eyes upon its innocence and seen that it was his. Like a true man, he had taken possession of his own.

I stood, entranced, speechless. He never moved, nor repeated his question. He stood perfectly still, with his heart thumping under my right palm like a mighty eagle beating itself against the bars of a cage.

I looked back along the week of doubts, fears, terrors, raptures. After all, my lover was not pledged to another woman. He was not going to be a priest. He was mine—God sent, God given. The love which pulsed into life as I held him, that night, in my arms, under the pure, silent stars, had dropped indeed direct from Heaven. I saw the white flower suddenly burst open in the sunshine, and turn all its sensitive pearl-like petals, its deep gold heart, to him unchecked. I saw it as an angel with wide white wings, bright now with celestial fire, overshadowing him for ever.

I looked up into his eyes, and leant a little nearer to him. Before crossing the road, he had taken off his cap and thrown it on the seat of the dog-cart, so he was standing, bareheaded in the strong sunlight. As he stood, waiting, a baby zephyr stirred his hair and showed the line of the deadly scar. The sight gave me back my speech which poured out in a red hot flood of verbal fire.

"Yes. I know you love me. And I love you for being so sure that I love you. Oh, man, man, do you know how a woman loves? I'll try to tell you. You have an idea it's all on your side—that, with us, love is a more or less passive thing—that we suffer your love, rather than drinking it in more greedily than the thirstiest drunkard. Ah, you don't know, for all your wisdom, how a woman can love. Now I may tell you, with only God to hear—tell you how I love you, tell you how I saved your life with mine, here where our happy feet are standing. You fell face downwards, and I saw the blood trickling down the road. I was obliged to turn you over, and I did, somehow. There was blood, too, on your lips, and directly I saw your face, I felt no more fear . . . only pity. I think motherhood began to wake in me, that night, before love. You were as helpless as a baby and infinitely more appealing, because of your great strong manhood. My whole woman's heart went out to you. Then, after a long time, I managed to pull the flesh together and to hold it tight, till I stopped the blood. As I held it, I suddenly got a frightful feeling that you were dead. I laid my ear over your lips, but couldn't feel any breathing. So I slid down somehow, and listened to your heart."

Here I noticed that his face was growing pale and that he was breathing like a man who had been running. I knew the feeling and sympathised. More, I took a delight in aggravating it.

"Like this," I said softly, withdrawing my hands to make way for my head on his breast. His left arm encircled me like a vice, and, leaning against him, I went on. "It was the first time I had ever heard a heart beat, and I shall never forget it. Then I wondered if it were some other woman's. But there wasn't time to waste in emotion. My fingers ached till I didn't know what to do—yes, do kiss them to make them quite well,—so I shouted till Warren came. After I had sent him off, as hard as he could flounder, in his thick boots, I discovered that the bleeding had stopped. So I left you a few minutes while I made a candle-grease plaster and stuck it on your temple. Then I banged some warmth into my hands and arms. When I came back to you, I found you were getting cold. I covered you with my cloak, and even took off my skirt, but it didn't seem any use. I felt I had saved you from one death only to let you die another."

My voice failed, for a minute. But I kept down the tears and raising my head, looked up at him again.

"I was utterly in despair. Artificial heat was the only thing to save you. So I slipped under the wraps, held you close to me, and did all my own breathing right inside the folds. I was afraid to cover your head too, lest I should stop the fluttering breath. But mine was enough. It made me red hot in a few minutes, and warmed you wonderfully.

Oh, it was marvellous, feeling your life dependent on mine, feeling you taking your life from me. And then, as we lay so still and warm, when my mind was at rest about the danger and I knew I was saving you, then there came that strange, extraordinary conviction that you were mine."

By this time, he was as white as ashes, and I could see the arteries throbbing in his neck.

"Oh, Phyllis," he whispered hoarsely. "I was yours. And I didn't know it. Think what I missed. Nothing can ever make up to me for missing that first night in your arms."

"Nonsense," I said soothingly, stroking his cheek with my left hand. "If you hadn't missed it, you never would have had it. That sounds a Hibernian remark. But, you see, if you had been conscious, I couldn't have done it."

"Well," I resumed after a short pause, during which he held me with a tenacity of which he was probably, unconscious, apparently lost in a trance. "It wasn't till next morning that I dared to admit to myself that I loved you—that if you were not my husband, no other man ever could be."

"Phyllis, I never dreamt of this. I never knew women were like this. Your words stab me like so many sharp daggers—delicious pain. Go on, go on. I am insatiable."

"But I had to admit it at last, or go mad. And I told Father Humphreys everything. And he told me, if the very worst should come, how my love might, in fact, must, be always a gift from God. But he didn't believe the worst would come. He was sure it would be right. And that afternoon,

I had you all to myself, and I knelt by you, holding your hand, timing my breathing with yours, lest it should be our last time together, lest when you wakened, I should find that you belonged to another woman. Then, as you know, I fell asleep, and then——"

"Then I take up the tale," he exclaimed, his colour coming back with a rush. "Randal had told me all about you, and as much as he knew of the way you had saved me. Before I fell asleep that morning, I was in love with an ideal. He told me you were not engaged. Phyllis, can you understand what a strong man felt towards a woman who had saved his life by her nerve and wit? I worshipped you, your weak white hands, your succouring womanhood. I fell asleep in love with an ideal. And I woke to fall in love with the real. You don't know how sweet you looked sitting beside me, your brave spirit willing to the end, but your fair flesh, weak with all the strain. Phyllis, that sleep of yours went straight to my heart, and you with it. I lay looking on you, loving you, afraid to stir, yet longing to see the colour of your eyes, to hear you speak. When you woke——"

"When I woke," I interrupted, laying my hand on his lips as a gag, "I met a look of ownership—or what I thought was ownership. You looked at me just as if you had taken me for yourself."

"So I had, wise, brave, sweet maid," he answered, with a return of his former grave tenderness, and drawing me again to his heart. "Ah, Phyllis, which is most intoxicating—loving you or being loved by you?"

"Now, that is a question which I am thoroughly competent to answer. Father Douglas and I worked it out long ago. It is sweeter to be loved by me than to love me."

He pondered deeply.

"Is it? Why?"

"Because loving me doesn't, of necessity, mean that I love you. Don't you see? You might love me, and I might not love you. But to be loved by me—why it's everything to you to know that I love you."

"Of course it is. What a thickhead I was not to see that before. Now, Phyllis, there is only one thing more I want to know: did you kiss me at all, even once, while you had me in your power?"

He asked the question so reverently that I scarcely blushed.

"Not once, or I should have told you even that."

"But why didn't you?" he asked, with tender reproach. "Didn't you know that I should have been unspeakably honoured and hallowed by it?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Oh, I'm woman enough, man enough, to know that. They say, you know, that every man's soul contains a woman and every woman's a man. That's why men, true men, are at times, so womanly, and true women so virile. I longed to kiss you. I knew if I didn't do it while you were unconscious, I might never do it all my life, that my mouth might go thirsty for ever."

"Then why didn't you?" he asked again, stooping his face nearer mine.

"Don't you see? Lest you should not be only your own. Lest you should be another woman's. It

was for her sake—the sake of the possible woman, that I refrained. You wouldn't have minded. She might."

"Now you have shown me the loveliest light in all your woman's heart," he murmured. "The delicacy and the honourableness of a woman. You refrained for the sake of a possible woman. Now have your way, for the sake of the real woman."

He drooped his head still lower, and at last his lips met mine, not eagerly, roughly or hotly. They clung to my mouth as lightly as a honey-seeking butterfly, and felt as sweet and cool as a dew-laden rose.

It was long, very long, before we moved or spoke. The sunset was past and even Dame Twilight was preparing to abdicate in favour of the queenly night, sable-robed, star-sceptred and crescent-crowned. The robin had, somewhere, turned himself into a ball of sleeping fluff, but the stream still flowed, laughing and murmuring, to the sea.

I lighted the dog-cart lamps and drove away into an enchanted world. Before we reached Halsanger, we had settled all the future. Leo was to buy Halsanger Manor, a beautiful property which had been for sale since June. This would make him the landlord of my dear Pearns, as several farms belonged to this manor. He was to engage Father Humphreys as our chaplain, and pay Percivale an ample annual fee for the use of the oratory—this to free him from his sister and to enable him to devote all their private income to her. His cottage was to be altered, and thrown into the oratory which would need enlarging to accommodate a little congregation.

And Percivale and Father Humphreys were to live together in the farmhouse, letting only the land to a neighbouring farmer.

Leo and I were to be married soon, very soon, so that his new house might, from the first, have me as its mistress.

So we planned, happy ignorant children that we were, little knowing how different would be the reality, and how near to us was Queen Sorrow.

Life had become all roses. We had forgotten that roses have thorns.

CHAPTER XXII

DEAD SEA FRUIT

It is scarcely possible for any two chapters in a life-story to record such extreme contrasts as this one and the last. I have reached the point where I must tell of the sorest sorrow that ever came to me, or that ever can come, I think. Every day, one may quarrel with one's husband or with a bosom friend: only once, thank Heaven, can one quarrel for the first time, with one's lover.

It happened only a week after the plighting of our troth beside the stream. Leo had secured Halsanger Manor, though, of course, the legal formalities were still to be concluded. He had written to his father, informing him of our engagement and I had duly made the same announcement to Hugh and the other boys. It would be weeks, in fact almost three months before Leo could get a reply, by which time we should have become man and wife. But I being only a post distant from my family, was, every morning, receiving dirges which clumsily tried to turn themselves into congratulations at the end of the letter. "We shall be very glad to see you and Wedderburn next week, or whenever you can come,"

wrote Hugh. "But it will never be the same here, without you."

The irrepressible Archie scrawled some characteristic remarks. "I told you you would find bacilli at Blackcombe. Much better have gone to my Dartmoor inn and remained fancy-free. You've got the worst of all—the love microbe, which can only be cured by marriage and then it's too late. Phyllis, Phyllis, I thought your constitution was a tougher one, or I should have swooped down and carried you out of infection weeks ago."

I was longing to show Leo my home and kindred and I didn't realise, till receiving their letters, that it would be a trying visit for us both.

We spent the afternoon of September 8th, in the manor house, mapping out rooms, furniture, wall papers, on voluminous lists. Before tea, we strolled to the ruins and there the terrible thing happened. My temper had been already ruffled by several refusals on Leo's part to give in to my ideas about certain arrangements in the house—refusals which made me half wonder whether he or I would rule. In the first flush of young love's pride, I expected to queen it over my lover at every point. I suppose every newly-betrothed maid feels the same, and it is touch and go when she suddenly finds that her slave is also her lord. I was, of course unreasonable, though equally of course, I blamed Leo for riding over me rough shod. I was too dazzled then, to see what a mercy it is when men are men—when they stand out for what they know is right and are deaf, blind, and callous to all feminine entreaties. Those are the men we go on loving and respecting to the

end. The man who gives in may please us at the time. But unjust and ungrateful that we are, we despise him for it later. If I could only have seen it, Leo was absolutely right. My suggestions were impracticable, and his first rejection of them, most gentle. It was my persistence which called out his firmness.

I was in a dangerous mood by the time we reached the ruins, but poor Leo did not gauge it, and blundered into a criticism of my most successful book, which finally ignited the gunpowder. I am bound to record that he was wrong in his criticism. He himself was the first to admit it, later. But it caused the explosion which first appalled, then made him angry, and finally cut him to the heart. Even now, I cannot dwell on the details. We parted, after deciding that each had disappointed the other and had become a broken ideal—and went home, heart broken, to our separate teas.

I could not eat a crumb. The very sight of the dainty tray turned me sick. Pleading a headache, I went to my room, locked the door and flung myself on my knees by my bed. I was back, then, in my own room, for Leo, as soon as he could, had taken rooms at the primitive inn.

So I was kneeling just where I had knelt two weeks before, watching the life I had saved.

Every nerve in my body ached with agony. The heart-pain even drew beads of perspiration to my skin. It was the first time sorrow had come to me in my own person. Hitherto, I had only looked with pitying eyes upon her suffering subjects. But, at last, I, too, was hers, body and soul.

It was a fearful experience. Every now and then, the mental agony was such that I could not remain still, but had to rise and pace the room, wringing my hands together, feeling inclined to beat my head against the wall. It was very long before I could think collectedly. The fire of anguish obscured every idea and thought, with its flame and smoke.

When my mind began to work at all, its first conscious impression was that Leo had failed me. All my love, my trust, had been worse than in vain. I had been wrong to love him or any man like that. He was not worth it. I had been mistaken in him. My idol had feet of clay, like every other idol. Father Humphreys had been wrong. I might have known that a priest could have no experience of such a subject. No doubt, they were taught beautiful theories, but theories were useless for the practical sorrows of life. God was cruel. The sooner I was dead and damned, the better.

The second conscious thought was that I had failed Leo. Professing to love him so immeasurably, I had failed in the first test—had preferred my own way to his, had shown him not a fraction of patience when he blundered. In looking back, I am thankful to think that this thought was more agonising than the other. Even in the first hour of outraged love, I was sorrier for him than for myself. Nothing could ever make it right. The past was irrevocable. Even if I went to him, wrote to him and gave in graciously upon the points which I had yielded ungraciously, nothing could make him forget how petty I had been.

Besides, to give in would, at best, be undesirable.

If I hadn't done so, early in the afternoon, probably he would not have been so silly and unkind about my book. If one gave some men an inch, they took an ell and it was far better to find it out before marriage.

So my chaotic thoughts whirled on, engulfing me in black depths of despair, dragging me, bleeding up rock-strewn precipices of false hope, only to fling me back into the lower darkness again. I felt stunned with the thundering of the tempest, the roar of the earthquake, the crash of the death-bearing avalanche. My whole life had fallen into ruin. At last the active process of destruction ceased and I was left, numbed and almost senseless, to gaze at the hopeless wreck.

From this contemplation, I was roused by a knock on my door.

"Come in," I said mechanically.

It was Susan, her bright colour faded by apprehension. For one awful moment my heart stood still. I thought she had come to tell me that Leo was dead. I—yes, it came home to me suddenly—I had been meditating self-destruction, during the past hour. I owned to it, with a thrill of horror. What if he had felt the same, and had been hastier than I? With every nerve tightened till I gasped for breath, I stood staring at Susan, unable to ask a question. She saw my agitation and perplexity joined anxiety in her usually placid countenance.

"Oh my dear life, Miss, don't trouble like that. Doctor says it baint serious yet—not dangerous that is?"

"What?" I whispered hoarsely.

"'Tis a stroke, like, and doctor made out that the poor gentleman wanted you and Mr. Wedderburn so soon as he comed around a bit. Mr. Wedderburn is with 'en now."

I did not, even then, understand who she meant. All I took in was that Leo was safe. The sudden relaxation of the strain was too much for me, and, for the first time in my life, I fainted dead away. When I came to, I was lying on my bed and Dr. Randal was bending over me.

"My poor little child," he murmured, with a tenderness which amazed me. "It has all been too much for you, and we rough men haven't realised how much too brave you have been. Lie still, little child, for a bit. There is no need for you to move."

"What has happened? Who is ill? Did I faint?" I clamoured, ungratefully flinging off his hand and sitting up.

"It is poor Percivale. He has had a stroke, of some kind. I don't anticipate any danger, but with those paralysed cases, queer things sometimes happen."

"Good heavens," I exclaimed, rolling off the bed and standing defiantly upright before the indignant doctor, though I had to hold the iron bar with one hand. "Oh, poor Percivale! I suppose the sudden joy and the fulfilment after fulfilment of his dearest wishes has been too much for him."

"Very likely," said the doctor, recovering immediately, and walking round to me. Before I could even guess his intentions, he had slipped an arm round me, and with the other behind my heels, had laid me full length on the bed again before I had time to protest.

"That's what we do with naughty children who assume the perpendicular too soon after a fainting fit," he said, seating himself again beside me. "And if you move again, Phyllis, till I give you leave to, I shall sit on you, in more senses than one."

"Did I faint then?" I asked, resentfully. "It's the first time in my life and it shall be the last. That I swear. For heaven's sake, don't ever tell the boys. I should never, never hear the end of it."

"The boys?" he echoed, surprised. I could see him wondering why I did not allude to Leo, and the fact that he refrained from comment, told me that he either knew or suspected the truth.

"How do you feel?" he asked, tenderly, putting a finger on my pulse which was hammering in a manner altogether unlike that of a person who had lately fainted. Worried and disgusted though I was, I could not help laughing at the rapidity with which the professional finger left my wrist.

"You young humbug," exclaimed the doctor, with an air of relief. "I was quite upset about you, for the time. Susan came running into the parlour frightened out of her wits. I was here, you know, waiting to see you. That is what she came up to tell you, really. So you hadn't been two minutes unconscious before I was with you. But I'm bound to confess it was one of the briefest faints I ever saw. You didn't give me time to offer any remedy. What was it about, Phyllis?"

"Well, I was rather done, after a long afternoon," I answered, composedly. "Then I didn't have any tea. And I suppose my nerves have been a little bit on edge without my knowing it, because when Susan

came in looking as if there had been at least a murder in Blackcombe, it startled me. Now, if you are really nice, you will ring the bell. I will have a belated tea—and go to Percivale whenever you will let him see me."

"I don't think he wants you for anything particular," replied the doctor, rising to comply with my request. "And Wedderburn is with him now. I think you had better not see him to-night. He may be better to-morrow. And I think you have done enough for one day."

"I haven't," I moaned. The thought of the long evening and still longer night appalled me—I who had been so great a lover of solitude.

"I am too restless to stay in. Can't you ask me to dinner?"

"I should rather think so. I'll send the victoria for you at 6. Bring night gear too, if you like and sleep with us. At any rate, that'll give you the latest bulletins of Percivale, and will save my coming or sending here, about him."

I thanked the kind man, almost with tears of gratitude. It was just what I wanted—to be petted and spoilt, and indulged with pleasant society, to keep my wretched mind off my miseries.

Next morning, Mrs. Randal protested so piteously at my threatened departure that I stayed on till lunch time, partly to hear the doctor's report of the patient.

"He's better, extraordinarily better," he said, in a tone of satisfaction. "Wedderburn has been with him all night, sleeping on a sofa in the room."

"What does his sister say to that?" I put in.

"I don't know, quite. Nothing to me. Nothing recorded, to him. I only know what he says of her."

"Who? Percivale?"

"Lord, no! When did you ever hear him utter a harsh word about anyone but himself? Wedderburn."

"Does he dislike Miss Douglas?" asked Mrs. Randal, in mild surprise.

The doctor rolled his eyes in simulated frenzy.

"Dislike her. He says he should kill her if he had to live with her a week."

Disgraceful though it was, I burst out laughing. I could so well imagine Leo saying it.

"He says he doesn't defend his sentiment. Far from it. But he continues to say he would kill her. And that, if for no other reason, Percivale deserves canonisation for having lived with her ten years and not even injured her. I'm afraid Wedderburn's right, too," continued the doctor rubbing up his hair, in a harassed manner—a trick of his when worried. "She's the kind of woman to make any man's life a hell upon earth. But for the man who is dependent on her——"

The speech broke off and ended in a pregnant silence.

We, neither of us, commented. Mrs. Randal looked depressed. I was absorbed in pitying contemplation of Percivale's past life and in glad anticipation of his future one. If Leo and I were never married, that need not affect any plans, I reflected with thankfulness.

"I've sent for Humphreys," continued the doctor, after a long pause. "Percivale seems to want him, and Wedderburn is wild to get him here. He seems

awfully taken with what you have told him about him, Phyllis. Says he is the very opposite to the other one, and evidently, another rare and beautiful nature. He wants to secure his services as his future chaplain, so of course, there's a lot for the two of them to discuss."

My heart leapt with sudden delight at this announcement.

Hitherto, my life's sky had been of Stygian darkness. But now suddenly, a star had appeared in it—a star all the brighter for its loneliness. Father Humphreys had helped me before. He would help me again. He couldn't ever make things right, of course. God Himself could not do that. Even omnipotence is powerless to undo the past. But, in some way, this priest would help me to go on living.

I watched the hours till his arrival, as eagerly as any ship-wrecked sailor ever watched for dawn.

CHAPTER XXIII

LOVE'S GETHSEMANI

It was not possible for Father Humphreys to arrive before evening of the next day—which day, as it happened, was Susan's wedding day. So I had a long wait that was rendered more agonising by attendance at the modest little ceremony, and an inspection of the sweet cottage home, beforehand. It had long been arranged between Susan and myself that when everything was absolutely ready on the morning of the feast, I should see her new home from threshold to garret. In the circumstances, I would have given anything to back out of the agreement. But to have done so, would have been idiotic and cruel. So I went with a brave face and an aching heart.

The little place was half a mile distant from the farm, and stood alone in its own garden which had, clearly, been the object of industrious attention. Late though it was in the year, some pink roses bloomed on a bush beside the porch, and the rest of the garden was a blaze of small sunflowers and scarlet nasturtiums. I don't think that, to my dying day, I shall ever see nasturtiums without a pang of pain. Their fire-hued petals were, to my abnormal

sensitiveness, a reflection of the flames which felt to be burning my life away.

Blushing and dimpling, Susan lifted the latch, and invited me inside. First, we saw the little kitchen, with its open fire-place, low-raftered ceiling and dresserful of common blue "clome." A row of geraniums adorned the casement window sill, rearing proud heads over the white spotted muslin blind, and there were full crimson curtains on a red cord, all ready for winter nights, when the sea winds would beat on the panes for admittance.

The parlour was, to my great surprise, as tasteful as the kitchen. The stone floor was covered by strips of cocoa-nut matting with a broad red border. A fine old grandfather's clock, with a brass face, drew itself up proudly to the very ceiling, and an oak settle stood beside the hearth. An old oak table, much the worse for wear, occupied the middle of the room, and a carved chest completed the large articles of furniture. Susan was much pleased at my surprised admiration; she explained that each object was an old family treasure from one side or the other of the house, and that she much preferred them to new articles.

We then ascended the bare white stairs and gained the nuptial chamber. This was, clearly, the girl's chief pride. The floor was covered with white oil-cloth bearing a design of crimson roses; white cretonne curtains, adorned with similar blossoms, were draped round the large wooden bedstead and the window; the china ware matched, and the furniture was of plain white enamel.

"Susan, Susan, how utterly sweet!" I exclaimed

with a choke. "Oh, how you working people do score over us! Fancy arranging one's home with one's own hands, and walking straight into it, after the marriage, and turning the key on the world. Fancy cooking your husband's supper for the first time, and sleeping in your own bed instead of some horrid foreign hotel which you would probably never see again. It is perfect, all of it."

"Yes, Miss. I made the quilt, every stitch of it," she added, laying her strong red hand on the snowy knitted coverlet. It was composed of small squares, and in the centre of each was a raised shell. The deep border was of a lace design in scallops.

"It took three winters to knit it, Miss. And the cotton alone cost me £5. They say I could sell the quilt for £25, and 'twould last generations."

I stood still, thinking: thinking of all the thoughts which must have filled the maid's mind, which would fill any maid's mind, when engaged upon such a task. The happy bride, the proud young mother, the placid white-haired granny with her children's children scrambling over her bed for a good-morning kiss when she should at last be too feeble to rise for breakfast—all these lively lovely pictures were worked in among the white threads of the big quilt.

As I stood, I again felt drops of agony start out on my skin. The only bride-bed I should ever know was the hard roadside, under the cold stars, clinging desperately to an unconscious and dying man—whom I had saved only to break his heart and my own. Better far, if we had died there together that night.

I could not speak. I simply kissed the happy bride elect, and passed downstairs without a word.

The fourth room, a little spare bedroom, was not yet furnished.

Two hours later came the ceremony in the church and, in due time, they passed among us, for better, for worse, to their home.

If it had not been for the hope of seeing Father Humphreys that evening, I do not, honestly, know how I should have lived out the day. When he came, I was lying, utterly spent, in my easy-chair beside the fire after tea.

"I came because I have so much to say," he began, when our first greeting was over. "The main thing, of course, is to congratulate you with all my heart upon the glorious end of your hopes and fears."

The words lashed me unendurably.

"Don't!" I moaned. "It's all over. I have broken his heart and he mine. It's all a horrible mess, a delusion. My life has gone to pieces. You are my last hope. You saved me before. If I'm not past saving, you will save me again. If any man can, you can. But tell me, have you seen Leo? I haven't set eyes on him for three days."

"My poor child! I am grieved. But don't you know that hearts are made to be broken? Yes, I have seen and talked with Mr. Wedderburn. He didn't mention you. It was the doctor and Percivale who told me."

"But what did he say when you congratulated him, as I suppose you did?" I broke in.

"He thanked me very gravely—very gratefully, too. How does the thing stand, practically? Have you broken off the engagement?"

"No, no, nothing as definite as that. I never thought of doing that. We simply decided that we had failed each other and parted, and we haven't met or written since."

Father Humphreys thought, deeply. I watched, breathless.

"Do you want advice?" he asked at last, with a smile.

"I want everything: advice, sympathy, scolding, everything you can give me."

"I can't scold you," he replied, gently. "Everything else I will do for you to the best of my ability. Now, to be practical, first. Mr. Wedderburn goes up to London to-morrow on business, so you needn't fear meeting him about here. Don't break silence for a day or two. It is impossible to tell just what his line will be, I mean, what he is feeling. Of course, he loves you still——"

"Loves me still?" I gasped.

"Of course. Just as you still love him."

I leant back, speechless at his audacity . . . when I had expressly told him that we were deceived in each other.

"You are both only novices in the Order of Love yet," he continued, looking earnestly at me. "Tell me all about it, if you will."

Thankful to be able to speak out at last, I poured out my story. I told him of the parting in the ruins, of the hour of agony in my room, of my despair, everything. He listened just as when I spoke to him before, without comment, assenting soothingly here and there.

When at last I had finished, he waited before speaking. And as he spoke, it seemed to my

anguished soul that one of God's angels must be revealing himself in the form of man, so great was the light and peace which his words gave me. I wrote them down the same night, before going to bed, so that I should keep them all my life.

"Your story does not surprise me a bit. It grieves me, as far as the present suffering goes, for you both. And yet, even while grieving, I am glad of it—glad of what the pain is doing for you now, and what it will do in the future. You think, my child, that your love was a mistake, or else that it is over. You are wrong on both points. It was not a mistake. You saw each other as you were and are. You saw each other at best, at the highest point of perfection which each nature can touch. And, remember, these perfect creatures were your two true selves. But what you didn't see was your imperfections . . . the flaws which will pass with time, and which, in this life, often obscure the real self. The imperfections of nature are like the clouds which temporarily obscure the sun. Behind them, the sun shines on as hot and clear as ever. Behind the passing cloud of some imperfection, your true self shines on for ever. You were right about each other, not mistaken. Don't be deluded by the clouds. As for your love being over, love never can be over, once it has come into existence. It is as immortal as life herself. It may be defiled, wounded, obscured, defaced. It can never never never be destroyed. Your love for each other is eternal. It may be veiled for this life. If so, it will shine for ever in the next. But I don't believe it will be veiled for very much longer."

"Oh, thank Heaven! Don't you?" I whispered, huskily.

"No, I don't."

He thought deeply, for a time, then went on:

"Love must be tried. How could its gold be distinguished from dross, otherwise? And is it of much value till it has been tried? To be really precious, it must pass through fire and flood, and come out unscathed. God has to try our love, before it is of any true value. We have to try each other's. Love must have her agony. But the hour in Gethsemani is only an hour, dark and bitter though it is; and even in that hour, the olives of peace keep watch, in trembling promise, overhead. The Resurrection is at hand, glorious, eternal. Would it be so glorious if it had never known the blackness of the tomb?"

He seemed, then, to be speaking more to himself than to me. I waited when he broke off. Then an idea occurred to me which made it impossible to keep silence.

"Father, I believe you. I believe it all. I know now that I love Leo more than ever. But how am I ever to believe that he loves me still? I mean, supposing I make the advance, and say I am sorry, and tell him I love him still, of course he would have to forgive me and say he loved me just as much as ever, wouldn't he? I mean, as a gentleman he would have to. You don't know how hard it is for a woman to believe in a man's love, especially when she has tried it. His chivalry makes her so sceptical. You see, he couldn't say he didn't love me any more. How am I ever to believe him, if he says he loves me still?"

Father Humphreys reflected.

"You have given me a new light," he said slowly. "I love to see things from a woman's standpoint. Probably men don't realise how difficult their chivalry makes it for woman's faith in them. I think, dear lady, that here you will have to *trust* your lover. We cannot always have sight, you know. Some of the most vital questions in life have to be taken on trust, by trust, with trust. And no doubt, it is fitting that it should be so. This gives you your chance of proving your faith in him. It's easy to believe when we see. That can scarcely be called faith, even by the most easy-going definer. You can't *know* . . . or see. You must believe, in the dark. And to digress a minute: We have just mentioned man's chivalry and the light you have shed on your view of it. Let me tell you another thing, while I think of it. Until I knew you, I never knew that women, too, are chivalrous. Your estimate of man is the same as man's estimate of you. I never knew how much women reverence us."

His words made me glow with delight.

"Didn't you? Well, they do. And so they ought to. A pure woman is a wonderful and beautiful being. But, surely to goodness, a pure man is immeasurably more wonderful."

He sighed. "Yes, that is undeniable."

"Then there is another point which worries me," I continued. "Leo was wrong, you know, about my book. And, after all, why should I be the first to make the advance? I am willing enough to, but I want to know the reason why."

"I wasn't aware we had decided that you are to," he answered, crisply. "But granted now that you

are to: you mean is it prudent for you to do so and to overlook any fault in him—to forgive him before he asks, before you even know whether he is sorry?"

"Yes."

"Well," he said, thoughtfully, "that rests with you to decide. Of course, speaking as a theologian, as a confessor, contrition is laid down as an essential condition for pardon. Otherwise, the balance of justice would never be adjusted, and there would be no check on wrongdoing. But speaking as a man——"

"Yes?" I hinted, as he paused.

"Speaking as a man," he resumed, with a smile, "I can only tell you what I always do myself in like case. When I have fallen out with a friend——"

"I don't believe you ever fall out with anyone," I interrupted, rudely.

"Then you had better pray for an increase of faith. When I fall out with a friend, I always find myself forgiving him——"

"Is that a figure of speech, or is it really never a her but always a him?" I groaned.

"Sometimes it is a her. Remember I have half a dozen sisters. Well, I always find myself forgiving them, him, her, whichever you prefer, without waiting to know his dispositions. Even if he is obviously in the wrong, it makes no difference. My judgment, my conscience, or what I call my conscience, protest in vain. Love outruns these to the tomb of self. How should she fail to outrun the others? Love outruns them to the tomb of my dead self, loving on and forgiving, in spite of all. And I must add this: never once have I found her wrong. Subsequent

events always prove her right, and conscience and better judgment always, always join her at last beside the sepulchre. It is simply what I say: love, the beloved one, outruns the rest; but they do join her in the end."

"There is another thing," he resumed, after a long pause. "As no two hearts are exactly alike, neither do they love in exactly the same measure. We ought always to remember that the heart of each friend gives us all that it can. If the love seems to fall below our standard, we must not judge it. If you have two glasses, one large and one small, but both brimful of wine, would it be just to blame the smaller one for holding less than the larger? It holds all that it was meant by its maker to hold. That is enough. If any friend seems to fail us, we must never forget that he has given us all the love which his heart can possibly hold. We should be mad and wicked to reject it because it seems to us inadequate. Where should we all be if God measured by such standards? Suppose, for example, He were to reject my love because it is less than Percivale's? It would be Heaven help most of us, in this world and the next."

He spoke with more emotion than I had ever seen him display, and took leave of me at once.

But he left peace behind him. "Peace sitting under her olives" had looked on me at last, and had called me to her kingdom. I was so sure all would come right that, strangely enough, I felt no overpowering desire to break the silence. Leo loved me. I loved him. What need for speech? The only need would be if he doubted my love; then, indeed,

it would be necessary to reassure him. Yet, if he doubted, he didn't love me, after all.

Strangely enough, in a poor little heathen like myself, it was the thought of God's love which most comforted me. It seemed to me the basis on which our human love was resting. I had once heard a discussion between the two priests on the subject of love, divine love, and had gathered that, like grace, it is something definite and substantial—something with as real a being as matter, perhaps more real. I clung to this thought above all others: whether or not God loved me, He loved Leo, and was present, therefore, in his soul. Whether or not He was present with me, mattered less. He was with Leo—and Leo was safe. Continually, I reached out to the Infinite Love enthroned in my lover's soul. And I felt, if love were a definite substance, that I had the power actually to project mine to him, and to enfold him safely in the highest, most spiritual part of my nature. I was convinced that some most real and definite part of me, Phyllis, could reach and mingle with my lover, without the medium of words, or the intercommunication of the senses. And this certainty made me hope that God was with me—even me. Surely God is with any heart that loves, purely, and truly?

I sat up late, scribbling in my diary, and many times have I meditated on the words about woman's chivalry. Yes, there is no question about it. I love men. I worship them. I almost adore them. I think them immeasurably superior both in mind and heart to ourselves. Shallow people—or what I call shallow people—say that men are superior to us in

intellect only because they have been and are, more highly educated. Rubbish. Look at the working classes. The boys and girls, there, learn side by side, in the same schools. And, when it is done, compare the intellect of the men with that of the women. You get the same discrepancy. Or if the poll parrot school admits this discrepancy, it teaches, by way of compensation, that we are superior in heart. Worse rubbish. There may be, are, cases of love in woman which rise to heroic heights. But take the everyday men and women — and see the steadfastness, the endurance of the average man's love. It never blows hot or cold. It doesn't matter how the woman may treat him. He has no petty pride, no silly vanity to get wounded. He is always, one bit of him, child-like—and when once he loves, no matter how his love may be treated, he loves on to the end. Yes, I love men. I love writing of them. I love the different man characters I have thrown on the white pages of this book. How utterly unlike they are—Dr. Randal, Leo, Felix, Percivale—and what diverse colours have been required in order to paint them. Yet it seems to me that it is only the finishing wash which makes the difference between each picture. The ground work, the fundamental, is the same in every instance. I may be wrong. I may easily be wrong. These are deep matters. But it seems to me that there at bottom, is man, man's nature, and it is only the surface wash of circumstance which gives us the difference. In Percivale's position, wouldn't Leo or the doctor have been what he was? In Leo's position, wouldn't Felix or Percivale have loved me as

he does? As far as that goes, they all love me, of course. It is only circumstance which gives the final detail, the last touch, to differentiate each love from the other. If man's heart is fundamentally the same in every age, so too is love. The final element which makes love to be conjugal or virginal or fraternal or paternal is only accidental, and a detail.

I meditated long, then went to bed, and dreamt I was resting in Leo's arms, with my head pillowed on his heart.

CHAPTER XXIV

A KNIGHT OF HEAVEN

THINKING there might be Mass in the morning, I went down to the chapel at 7 o'clock. And there heard such news, found such happenings, as drove even the memory of Leo temporarily out of my mind.

As soon as I opened the oratory door, I was astounded to see Percivale kneeling in his usual place. I knew he was much better but never expected to find him out already.

Yet this shock of surprise was nothing to the one which followed it. As I closed the door, he turned to me, with such a look in his face, such a flash in his eyes, that I stared, spellbound. Then he rose, came over to where I stood and took my hand—my right hand—in his. I was too amazed, too dazed, to ask a question. And when his hitherto helpless fingers closed on mine with a grip that made my knuckles crack, all I could do was to flop down on a bench, unable to stand for trembling.

"Phyllis, I have been very sudden. But I won't apologise because I am impenitent," he began, smiling as I never seen him smile before. "I would do it again to-morrow if I could give you an equally

great shock. If you knew the joy it is to me, you would forgive my folly, and inconsiderateness."

I still stared, like a dummy. The amazement, the groping after an explanation of this miracle, had bereft me of all sense.

"As you see, I am cured. And by no miracle," he went on, as though contradicting my unspoken thoughts. "Such things are common enough, it seems, and most of us have heard of them, in the abstract. My paralysis was, as you know, due to some obscure injury—some numbing of the sensory nerves and of the muscles, possibly by pressure, either local or at a distance from the affected limb. It was caused, as you also know, by shock and injury, both. But the surgeons always considered that the shock was the main factor, rather than the actual local injury. Well, as is sometimes the case, shock has cured. You know I had a sort of stroke a few days ago?"

I nodded.

"Well, that did it. I felt as if something snapped, as if some pressure were suddenly removed. That was followed by a tingling in my arms and hands, and though for a few hours, speech was difficult, I could feel the stirring and movement in the arms all the time. It was as if the normal circulation and movements were reasserting themselves, after long years of inaction. I guessed at once what was happening. But I wouldn't tell the doctor till I was sure. I knew it would be such a horrible disappointment to him if nothing came of it. I dissembled for a day or two—and told him everything, last night. In fact, I began by shaking hands

with him, as I did with you, and upon my word, I never saw a man more astounded. Really, he was as amazed as you—with much less excuse, because, as a medical man, he ought not to have been surprised at all, I told him. Of course, he pulled himself together directly and examined me, and explained the whole thing. You know, it was the joy at Mr. Wedderburn's proposals which did it—the establishing of my heart's desire on so solid a basis. And above all, the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. Oh Phyllis, to use a hackneyed phrase, I did literally feel as if my heart would break with joy. The rapture, the thankfulness were really unbearable. Think of all it means to me—after such a life. But instead of my heart, something else broke, and set me free at last."

At this point, I began to cry. Then I seized the white hands, no longer barren and helpless, and kissed them thankfully.

"Oh, you dear, you patient, beautiful, wonderful thing, you do deserve it, you do, you do," I sobbed, speech returning upon the tide of tears. "At first, I was simply thunderstruck. But now, I am not even surprised. It's like what one imagines God is—exactly like Him, to have given you this wonderful life and then to crown it and heal it with joy. Just think! You are healed by joy."

Here I became inarticulate for a moment, and I could see tears glitter in the patient eyes, looking down at me so kindly.

"It's just all what I should have planned out, if I could have conceived anything so lovely, and had the power to bring it all about," I resumed, passion-

ately. "And if I ever repined at your awful cross, now, more than ever, I see what a blind, wicked fool I was. It has made your life far more glorious than if you had always been like other priests. And oh! now at last, at last you will say Mass."

I checked myself to look again into the white face, at the white lips so soon now to be wet with the Blood of Sacrifice. All through the story, it had been the barren hands and the barren mouth which had wrung my heart so sorely. The reception of the chalice by the celebrant only, always appealed to me as so significant. Even a priest himself, if he were not saying Mass, received Holy Communion like the laity. Now at last, his tongue would pronounce those awful words of consecration, and his lips be reddened with the mystic, life-giving draught from the chalice. This knight of heaven was about to slake his soul's life-long thirst from a holy grail.

"Yes," he answered, with a radiance on his white face that filled me with awe. "Now at last I shall say Mass. But not for a few days, Phyllis. You must be patient a little longer, dear faithful little friend. There are several formalities to be gone through first. And then I shall go into retreat for some days, in preparation, as we do before Ordination."

"Meet me to-day in the ruins," I pleaded as Father Humphreys's footstep sounded, light and eager, outside the door. "Come after tea, and let's have a glorious review of the past—a sum up, a pæan of thanksgiving."

He nodded acquiescence, and then returned to his place. Father Humphreys did not speak as he

passed me, but he gave me such a look of joy and triumph out of his soft blue eyes that they seemed to flash with celestial fire. All through Mass, I looked on in anticipation to the day when the positions should be reversed: when Felix should attend meekly on the celebrant, with crossed hands and bowed head. Several times, I marvelled at the restraint, the calm of both priests. They went through their sublime duties as composedly as if nothing extraordinary had happened, as if each heart and soul were not aflame with rapture.

As soon as the service was over, I flew back to Halsanger and told Mrs. Pearn the glad news. Her delight was amazing. Then I swallowed a cup of coffee and raced off to the Randals, whom I found in the middle of breakfast.

"Phyllis, I shall change your name to Hygeia if you appear at this hour of the morning with such shining eyes and such rose-red cheeks," said the doctor, as his wife got up and kissed me warmly. "Have you breakfasted? Anyway, you can manage a second edition. All authors want second editions, don't they? Of course, you've heard of Percivale's cure?"

"Yes, yes, yes. I've seen him, talked with him. Oh, it's divine! But tell me, will it last?"

To my surprise, the doctor became grave. At first he did not reply.

"Why do you ask such a question, witch?"

"I don't know. Surely, it is an obvious one? I'm so afraid he might have another stroke and go back to the old state."

"His present state will last as long as life lasts,"

said the doctor slowly. "I think you need have no fears."

I saw Mrs. Randal glance keenly at her husband, but neither this look nor his oracular words, gave me any suspicion of what was to come.

I remained with her till lunch time, talking over the future with indescribable satisfaction. By then, I felt so sure my own trouble would come right that I did not need to check all her joy at having me settled for life in Blackcombe. The recent event had given me an increase of hope and trust. It was inconceivable that I should ever be severed from the place where all the crises of my life had happened.

After lunch, I wrote to my long-suffering brothers, explaining briefly, and telling them not to expect me till they actually saw me, as the fixing of dates, in such circumstances, was an impossibility.

After tea, I made my way once more to the ruins —that scene of joy, despair, peace, tumult, death, life. Percivale was before me, and I flew to him with outstretched right hand.

"Squeeze!" I cried, with a peal of laughter. "Oh, divine pain! I should love it if you would crush my very finger bones. Do you remember how I once longed to squeeze some of my superfluous life into this white right hand? Well, my wish is granted. I think all my wishes are, and sometimes before I really know that I want them."

"I remember," he said, with a smile. "Does the thorn forget his rose? Phyllis, as you have been more than anyone to me in my sorrow, so you are more to me in my joy. See how inextricably you are mixed up with it all—how the threads of your life are interwoven with mine."

"Yes, aren't they?" I agreed, as we sat down on the historic pile. "And the loveliest threads of all, too. It's all the gold threads in your tapestry which are crossed with mine."

We were silent for a few minutes, while the unseen sea sang on of immortality.

"I have several things I want to tell you," he began. "Probably, some of them you see already, better than I can describe them. But it is good to go over them with you, even if you do. Phyllis, has it occurred to you to wonder whether I now regret the past, and feel utterly desolated with remorse at my fits of panic, depression, doubt, when this glorious fulfilment was breaking, like dawn, through my dark night? Well, I don't. It sounds a shameless thing to say. But I regret nothing, for this reason: my fits of weakness, my falls beneath the cross, have given me such a revelation of God's *patience*, as I never could have had if I had never failed."

"I see. I agree. It is a case again of 'O felix culpa,'" I answered, gravely.

"And it has destroyed my last remnant of timidity. I dare now to sing my Magnificat—to be *sure*. Sight has succeeded faith."

I watched him, awestruck, realising that I was seeing unrolled before my mental gaze, the fair scroll of a completed life story—the golden characters written by God's own finger upon the white heart of His priest.

"You know how I always hoped that this broken life might at last give God more glory than a whole life would have," he resumed. "And how I comforted myself by the belief that such a life was far

more difficult to live than an ordinary one. You know how I longed to be a saint, to be the lily among thorns—God's dearest here, and the one to give Him *perfect* worship. Well, I know now that all this has been fulfilled. Last evening, I had a vision . . . the first and probably the last of my life. Such things are not usual, except when God needs to teach us some particular thing which we could not, anyhow, know without a special revelation. For the ordinary purposes of spiritual life, He gives us interior lights at prayer-time and other times. But for the extraordinary, He resorts to extraordinary means."

I edged closer to him. His words thrilled me.

"I was standing outside the oratory at moonrise," he went on, slowly, "and as I watched the soft light shine on the white granite walls, suddenly it occurred to me to wonder if I loved the little place, and my life here too much—if I were really detached and really ready to do only God's Will in everything. So, silently, in my soul, I framed a prayer begging for this grace, that when death should come to call me away, I might go gladly, without one regret. Then came the light. I saw nothing with my eyes, heard nothing with my ears. I was as alive to my surroundings as I am now. I saw the moonlight glistening on the specks of quartz in the granite, and the white clouds drifting above the thatched roof. But I knew that One stood beside me Whose love for me is greater than any mortal love. I was aware of His presence by means of my mind, my soul. I could feel His embrace of my soul. Though it was spiritual, yet it was palpable. I never before

so clearly realised that the soul is an actual substance —not an imaginary, impalpable being. I could feel with my soul, when He touched it, and when He left go. It was as if my flesh had become spiritualised, as if my soul had penetrated, outwards through my body. Another revelation it gave me, that state, was the idea of what life will be like after death, and also of what our bodies will be like when they are glorified, though the first was clearer than the last because, as I say, the vision was purely soul to soul. I saw the presence without vision, I heard His words without sound. The words were imprinted on my mind without bodily speech. Yet, if anything, they were more distinct than the words we hear with our ears in the ordinary way. I could swear to every word now."

He paused again. I sat, far too frightened to speak. These were things far beyond me. And yet he put it so simply that I could follow and understand every word.

"The Beloved began by an expression of endearment which is the only thing I cannot describe," he went on, more slowly still. "I have tried to, ever since. I have taken every dearest epithet which human lovers ever apply to each other, but they all fall short of the reality. These expressions of endearment were the only wordless part of the whole—I suppose because human speech has no language to convey them. They belong to the language of Heaven. But it gave me such a sense of God's love for my soul as my mind never before conceived. It isn't possible to tell you how much He loves me, you, all of us. Well, try to imagine it. After that revelation of His love to me, came the assurance that

my prayer, my life-long prayer, has been answered —and in a way I never dreamt possible. Always I have prayed to give God a *perfect* service here in this place where my lot has been cast. I knew it was an impossible prayer because we can't, ever, in the flesh be perfect. Nevertheless, I always prayed for it, hoping that the desire of my soul would be accepted, rather than the shortcomings of my human nature. And my prayer is answered in this way: the Beloved made clear to me that death will not take me from here. It will only free me from my flesh so that my unfettered spirit may offer what it has always craved to offer—perfect worship, perfect praise, and that, too, till earth has passed. He promises me that I am indeed His dearest here, and that mine will be the first perfect worship to rise to the Godhead from this place.

"When the Presence left me, I went into the oratory, sat down and tried to reason myself out of it—telling myself that recent events had deranged my nerves and that the whole thing was fancy. But the more I reasoned, the more I believed it. At last, I called Felix, and told him what had happened. Without any hesitation, he told me that the whole *mode* of the vision was exactly in accordance with the teaching of mystical theology on the subject, and exactly described the 'intellectual visions' of the saints. And that the *subject matter* of the revelation was in perfect accord with theology."

"May I interrupt?" I whispered, terrified. "But I want to understand. I thought people go to Heaven when they die? How can you or anyone remain on earth after death?"

"That is exactly the point I was coming to," he smiled. "Where is Heaven?"

I reflected.

"Up beyond the stars, I suppose," I answered, dubiously. "Any way, innumerable miles from earth."

"Are you sure? Is God innumerable miles from earth? Doesn't God make Heaven wherever He is in the Blessed Sacrament? No, Phyllis, we are wrong. Heaven is not located. No one knows where it is. It may be the innumerable miles from earth for some of us. For others, no. Heaven is a state rather than a place. Heaven is wherever God reveals Himself. Heaven is to do God's Will. Heaven is inextricably mixed with earth. The angels and saints, we know, are always busied among us children of men. As they stand beside us, they enjoy the Beatific Vision which, in itself, makes Heaven. Then, there is Our Lord's Sacramental Presence upon earth which will abide till earth herself shall flee away. Where the King is, there is Heaven. So when death sets me free, think of me, Phyllis, as still here, as nearer to you than ever before. While we are in the body, we are limited by time and space. When out of the body, no. The Spaniards, you know, have a tradition that wherever Mass has once been said, God places an angel to adore Him till the end of time from that hallowed spot. Here, I am to be that angel. You understand? I have made myself clear? My future life, till time has passed, is simply to be what my past life has been—only without any more teasing imperfections."

I sat still, looking at the unearthly beauty of the vision. Besides the joy at the consummation of all his desires, my soul was stirred by truths which appealed to me on behalf of many other human beings. The nearness of Heaven, the closeness of our beloved ones after death, was unutterably beautiful. So too was the new idea of the nearness of God. Another point was the beauty of a common, hidden life, when lived absolutely for God. How precious must such lives be to Him, if He wished nothing better than to perpetuate them, after death, removing only the temporal, bodily details. As I sat there beside my friend, there came to me such a perception of the value of a human soul as I never could, otherwise, have conceived.

For a long time, we kept silence, each lost in contemplation. Then I rose and stole softly away, without disturbing Percivale's reverie.

I didn't know it then, but it was the last time I ever held speech with him—that evening when he revealed the vision of his life.

CHAPTER XXV

THE HEART OF A MAN

ALL the necessary preparations were happily concluded. Leo returned, the very evening that Percivale and I met, for the last time, in the ruins. Percivale himself duly went into retreat and his first Mass was arranged for the 24th, another feast of the Madonna's.

Still, Leo made no sign. And I began to wonder at his silence.

One soft evening, after a day of mild rain, Father Humphreys called on me just before tea, and invited me to go for a walk with him.

"I want to visit the spot where you first found Mr. Wedderburn," he explained, with a twinkle. "Do you realise that I have never seen it? Moreover, I want entertaining. With Percivale in retreat, Mr. Wedderburn steeped to the eyebrows in furniture from London——"

"Goodness! has he got on as far as that?" I interrupted. "Why, all the redecorating can't have been done in ten days, surely."

"Not all, no. The paperhanging and whitewashing is finished. The painting and enamelling is to be done after the furniture is in. They have

had a small army of men there to get it done. And some of the servants have arrived."

I listened, heart-sick. These were, all of them, details in which I ought to be assisting. The silence was passing strange. Did it mean that I had gone out of Leo's life, as completely as if I had never entered it, or was he simply preparing the place for our reunion?

I was depressed and preoccupied during tea, and certainly not a cheerful companion for a walk. Father Humphreys, however, seemed to notice nothing. He prattled on happily, about the cure, and his delight at settling in Blackcombe, until we reached the head of the hill.

"That is where I first saw him," I said, rousing myself. "Coming down the Seaford road, there."

"I see."

We were half-way down to the bridge when he suddenly stopped short, and looked at his watch.

"I say! I had no idea it was so late. I promised to be picked up by the doctor at the Halsanger cross-road at five. He has got a Catholic patient, who wants to see a priest, at one of the farms between here and Heathercombe. What an idiot I am! I had clean forgotten the time. Do excuse me. If I tear, I shall just do it. If you can still be patient with me, forgive me and bring me to-morrow. If you can't, I can find it for myself now."

Almost before I had time to reply, he had raised his hat and started up the hill. I stood irresolutely watching till he was out of sight, wondering whether or not I would go down to the bridge. I soon decided to. Whichever way things turned, that spot

was the dearest on the face of the earth to me. So I continued my way, and on rounding the curve at the bottom, came upon Leo himself.

He was standing still, as though waiting for someone. For one mad moment I wondered if the assignation had been with Father Humphreys. Then my faculties had to be entirely concentrated upon the difficulty of the position. Leo raised his cap, and advanced to meet me. I looked anxiously at his face. And the one glance told me all. I saw no nervousness, no anxiety, nothing but love—love as calm and radiant as the westering sun.

He stopped two paces from me, and opened his arms. Without a word, I walked straight into them and held my face up to his. And, in a long, long silence, we learnt many vast truths, among others, how much we loved each other, how delicious it is to pretend to quarrel, and how irrevocably our hearts had grown together, in the silence and the dark of the past ten days.

"Leo, your conduct is disgraceful," I exclaimed at last, struggling to get clear of his arms. It was perfectly useless. I might as well have tried to throw off an octopus. "Let go. I can hear wheels, I am sure I can. Leo, what do you mean? Why didn't you write and say you were sorry? And how dared you hold out your arms, just as if you thought I couldn't resist you? You ought to have apologised first, and then ascertained my sovereign pleasure as to the next move."

I was almost mad with joy. Ah, to hear again the sound of his breathing, to look into his eyes, to feel the grip of his arms!

"It's a glad, good world, Phyllis, my sweet Phyllis," he said, releasing me and holding me off at arm's length in order to see me more clearly. "And we are the gladdest, gooddest lovers in it. Wise, wise child! Did you quarrel on purpose, to make me love you ten times more because I had lost you? Phyllis, my lips, and ears and eyes are starved for want of you. But it's worth the fast. It heightens the joys of repletion. Sweetheart, it grieved me to thwart your wishes. And I was a chunk about your book. I have read nothing else ever since. And I'm proud of it."

"But why didn't you write and say so? Why didn't you break the silence, somehow? How did you know what I was feeling? How did you know I didn't need comforting?" I clamoured.

"Beloved," he answered gravely, drawing me back again to his heart, "I suffered more than any words can describe, more than anyone but a man can understand, every time I thought of you. But I knew that our love was imperishable and would come safely through the flames. Except the two nights I was in London, I have been here every evening at sunset, knowing you would come at last. I should have come here, month after month and year after year, till living or dead, you kept the assignation."

"Every evening? Oh, Leo! Why didn't I come before? How long I have been! And I shouldn't have come this evening, if it hadn't have been for Father Humphreys. How small and half-hearted my love is beside yours! It never occurred to me to come or that you would ever be here."

"She still has things to learn about man's love, just as he has about woman's," he answered, gazing fondly into my remorseful face. "I am not hurt that you had to be gently shoved into my arms, Phyllis. You came of your own free will, after the first push. And you would have come at once, if it had occurred to you."

"What do you mean?" I asked, suspiciously. "Oh, Leo! You don't mean to say it was a plant and that Father Humphreys knew you would be here—and that he left me on purpose?"

"Of course I mean to say it," he replied, composedly. "Really, Phyllis, for an author, you are wondrous dense at times."

I covered my abashed face and blushed till my fingers felt hot. Then I cast away all reserve and told him all I had been through . . . especially of the awful moment when I thought Susan had come to tell me of his death.

"My pretty! My poor little child," he said, fondling me as a father might have fondled his baby daughter. That element always strikes me in Leo's love. When I am suffering or in trouble, he is my father, rather than my lover or husband. I suppose it is the same with us. In such circumstances, it is the mother's love which reigns.

"But it was worth it, wasn't it, Phyllis? Would you have missed it? I wouldn't for anything the world could give me. Our love, when last we met, was only the shadow of what it is now. Humphreys was right. Love must be tried. It isn't half the value to the possessors till it is."

I went on to tell him of my visit to Susan's cottage

and my feelings then. He listened, reverently, almost as a priest might listen to the innocent confession of some white child.

"But still I don't understand why you kept silence," I finished.

"That's because I haven't told you yet. Phyllis, do you remember, or you do remember, that day of days when we plighted our troth. You remember how I told you of my love. I didn't ask if you loved me. I knew it already. All I asked you was if you knew I loved you. I made my supreme act of faith in your love for me."

"You did, you dear, you man."

"Well, I knew the joy of that faith to me and to you. And I never expected that the chance of a similar faith would ever come to you. If I had been the first to break the silence, I should have robbed you of the supreme chance of a lifetime—the chance of returning my faith by faith. If I had written, owned myself wrong, asked for forgiveness, that would have been the ordinary way of doing things. Our love is a love which can rise above the ordinary. I wanted you to come to me in the dark, without one sign from me, knowing that I loved you still. I wanted the advance to come from you, because of your certainty of my love for you. And it has. You have repaid me in my own coin."

"Oh Leo!" I cried, tears rushing to my eyes. "Would anyone but you ever have thought of it? But I didn't make the advance. I had to be dragged here by a third person—and then you held out your arms to give me a lead."

"No, you didn't. And no I didn't. You have

told me already, you have written in your diary, that you were so certain of my love, you didn't even want to write and get proof of it. Further, you intended to make the advance. Details are nothing. You have believed me in the dark, my precious, precious bride."

Then there was another long silence, broken only by the happy streamlet which laughed and sang to us in the same sweet old way.

Presently, Leo began to laugh too.

"If you are as mad as I am, Phyllis, let us honeymoon in a caravan. I can't think of any other way of giving you your tiny humble home in which you would 'do' for me with your own white hands. Let me give you a roomy caravan as a wedding present. It would always be nice for holidays. We could go off and rough it every year, when we get sick of servants and state. And we could start gaily on our wedding day for Westward Ho or some distant spot, and unaccountably break down here, on the bridge towards dusk, and have to camp—and so spend our first night on this hallowed spot, where you saved my life . . . spend it alone together under the stars."

I answered nothing. Speech would have been desecration. My silence gave consent.

When we turned our faces towards Halsanger, low, soft dove-gray clouds coquetted with the hill-tops, and above them, in the clear green west, hung the evening star.

"You have heard of the cure," I continued. "And I want to know if it will make any difference to future plans."

"Not any that I can see . . . except that if Percivale prefers it, I shall ask Father Humphreys to release me from our agreement as to the chaplaincy. He will be as anxious as I to meet Percivale's wishes in the matter. And it is quite possible, Percivale would wish to be the only priest in Blackcombe."

"Yes, I had thought of that. And if so, it would be a larger salary for Percivale, wouldn't it? That would be all the better for his sister."

"No. Whichever way it is, whether the salary is for the use of the oratory with him, or with another priest to officiate, it won't affect Percivale. I mean, he can't be our chaplain, of course. He is a man living on his own land, with his own oratory. I shall simply pay a liberal yearly sum to him in either case. If he wants Humphreys still, then I pay the extra agreed salary to him too. Either way, it is the same for Percivale. And that gives his sister the whole of their present income for her sole use. So she is provided for."

"I see. Leo, his first Mass is to be on the 24th. You know? You'll be there, of course? Will you serve it?"

"Not much. I should think Humphreys would see me extremely well blessed before he resigned that unique honour."

"Oh, what an idiot I am! But, Leo——"

"What, my darling?"

"You will go to Communion at it—you will receive Communion from Percivale?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Leo!"

My cry went to his heart. He stopped, caught me

in his arms, kissed me, called me more sweet names than I can remember, and once, I felt a drop on my cheek that I could swear was not rain.

"Tell me, heart's sweet," he said, sitting down on a stone, and drawing me to his knee as he would have a little child. "Can't you believe? What don't you believe?"

"Nothing. I don't know." I sobbed, with my head on his shoulder. "I don't disbelieve anything particular. I love it all, love it. I would give anything to believe it. But I can't. I don't know why. It's all outside me. I can't get it inside. I can't explain."

Then there came back to me again, the memory of that glorious hour when I had fought for Percivale's soul. I poured out this story to Leo, who listened in silence.

"For that hour I believed. It was part of me, inside my soul. But it wasn't for my sake. It was for his."

"It will be for your own soon, sweet wife," he murmured, tenderly. "You are a beautiful example of the supernaturalness of faith. You even want to believe. Your intellect dissents from nothing. Heart and mind, you have done your utmost. You are ready for the gift. But it *is* a gift. If God doesn't give it, we can never, by any natural exertion, obtain it. You are ready. He isn't, quite. He will give it at the best possible moment for you—and I think it will be soon. Phyllis, you are an example, do you know, of another thing, besides the unattainableness by human effort, of the gift of faith? You are an example of mystical union . . . or rather, at the

moment, non-union. I don't pain you, my darling? No. Well, at the beginning of the contemplative, the mystical life, I have heard priests say the same thing happens; they see the lovely ideal, the union with God, outside, afar from themselves. They strain after it, but for a time, can't reach it. Then suddenly it is given them, and becomes part of their soul. Contemplation, too, is a gift of God. That can't be attained by human efforts, either. The mystic can only dispose himself and wait. But it's a priceless lesson—a lesson for all of us—that there is only one place in all creation, where God and I can meet—and that is in my own soul. I may contemplate His beauty and wisdom in you, Phyllis, in the starry sky, the thundering sea; nay, I may even kneel adoring before the Tabernacle. But none of that is, of necessity, *union*. The only place where God and I touch each other is, as I say, in my soul where Spirit meets spirit in an actual, substantial, literal contact. You and I with a room between us, aren't literally united with each other. But we are, when you are in my arms. You wouldn't like to stand at one side of a room and look at me on the other side. It would try you horribly, not to mention me. You would crave to nestle against my heart. Poor little child! Be brave a little longer. God will come to you soon by His gift of faith. And with faith will come love—a love surpassing all other loves—the love for which you were created—the essential and eternal love beside which your love of me is only a shadow, an accident, a non-essential detail. Heaven wouldn't be Heaven without God's love, remember. It could be—though as a matter of

fact, it won't be—without man's. Human love will be one of the extra and most delicious joys of Heaven. It isn't its essential joy. And that is where the mystics anticipate Heaven here. They love God first, and creatures after."

I listened, awestruck, nestling against my lover's heart. Then I told him what I had longed to tell in detail—the unutterable comfort Father Humphreys had been to me during our estrangement.

"Leo," I ended, "what must priests be to big, big sinners? Think what such a man must be to souls black with sin and in utter despair!"

"Ah, I've seen something, felt something of it myself," he answered almost inaudibly. When most moved, Leo's voice always drops almost to a whisper. "And, Phyllis, one of my firmest beliefs is that no priest is ever damned. Think a minute. Think of all he sacrifices for God's sake. Think of the life-long fight against his man's holiest and deepest instincts in the natural order. And even if one here and there goes under, poor, poor fellow, and shocks us Pharisees till we draw aside the hems of our garments lest we should touch him—think of what outweighs his fall. It's inconceivable that any priest has failed to save at least one soul, either by his prayers, his Masses, or the administration of the Sacraments. Well, the value of a soul far outweighs the guilt of sin. That saved soul pleads for him, at the seat of judgment, and who can conceive that its pleading would be in vain? No, I never believe that hell will contain any soul stamped with the King's Own signet—the royal seal of Order. We are so petty, so cruel. We measure by our wretched, puny human standards, which attach far more importance

to people's vices than to their virtues. Even we ordinary people try far harder to be good than ever we try to be bad! And think of the average priest's struggles for perfection. I am never shocked or fearful when I hear of a priest's fall. Sorry? Yes, I am sorry from my heart. It makes me cry like a baby, for sheer pity. But I know that God will right it in the end."

I clung to him, weeping softly, but he did not notice me. He went on speaking, and I went on reading his soul as I had never read it before.

"And, Phyllis, there is another pet theory of mine to account for why the priest, in one way, seems almost more to us than God. It is this. Our Lord cannot go with us sinners into the *experimental* knowledge of sin. He, stainless as He is, can only look on sin theoretically, objectively, in the abstract. He got as near to it as He possibly could, in His temptations, when, for our wretched sakes, He let the devil actually clasp Him. It seems to me that this is one huge reason why the priest is essential to us. Our Lord gives him to us because we must have a love that is experimental, the love of a sinner like ourselves. God cannot give us this love direct, so He gives it through the heart of the priest. We love him because we are fellow-sinners, and God loves us to have this comfort. He generously gives, through the heart of a creature, what He cannot give direct from His Own Heart. When we kneel at the feet of a priest in confession, we know we are receiving the love of a fellow-sinner. It is a huge comfort to us sinners to be loved with an experimental love. Oh! thank God, thank God, for giving us our priests—our priests, and His."

CHAPTER XXVI

CONSUMMATUM EST

LEO and I spent the next day blissfully together in the Manor House. I say blissfully, but there was one flash of forked lightning from our clear sky . . . a flash which showed me an unimagined side of Leo's nature. It was provoked by a remark from me in the worst possible taste—a remark which was, indeed, unpardonable. And yet I was glad I made it, for otherwise, I never should have seen that side of Leo.

We had finished meandering through the rooms, and were sitting on the terrace, overlooking the placid sea.

"What are you thinking of, Phyllis?" suddenly asked my lover.

"You, of course. Silly!"

"I know that. What I really meant was what are you thinking about me?"

"I see. Well, I was wondering if, supposing you had turned out to have been married, I could have lived."

He drew nearer, and took my hand.

"Was the love as great as that?" he asked, tenderly. "But why worry about impossibilities?

The mere fact that you loved me so much meant I was yours."

"I know. But dreadful things do happen in life. People who aren't free do fall in love, don't they? Leo, supposing in years to come, you and I should, one of us, meet someone we loved better, what should we do? Supposing, for instance, I were to love another man better than you, what should I do, and what would you do?"

"Phyllis, I'm ashamed of you," he cried, turning white with anger. "I'm astounded that you can think such a thing, suggest such a thing. You ought to know that greater love between two mortals is not possible."

"Yes, now," I assented, quaking at the storm I had brewed. "But if it shouldn't last? It doesn't, always."

"I don't know what you would do," he flamed. "I know what I should do if you ever loved anyone better than me. I should kill you."

"Leo!"

For the moment, I thought he was jesting. But when I saw his face I knew it was grim earnest. Hence, my startled cry.

"I should kill you," he repeated, quite quietly, but with an assurance which was more terrible than his first anger.

I sat, trembling. And yet I knew deep down in my mind that never, among all the endearing things Leo had said to me, was there one which pleased me half so well as this terse threat. Whether it was feminine perversity which made me enjoy what ought to have shocked me: whether it was the light

on the jealousy of his love: whether it was an altogether new idea of his ownership of me, I don't know. Probably it was all these and many other things.

"No wonder they called you Leo," I said at last. "Whoever named you must have been a prophet. You untamed savage! You make me almost afraid to marry you! Think of my awful responsibility, mated with a primeval savage! Leo, how would you kill me? With a gun?"

"Not I. With my two clean hands. I would take you round your white throat and strangle you."

"You wouldn't even do it with my hair, like Porphyria's lover?"

"Hair, no! I'd do it with something of my own, as a man should. Fancy strangling a woman with her hair! Bah! I tell you, I should do it with my own clean hands."

"And how do you reconcile such theories with religion," I asked quietly.

"I don't reconcile them, little silly. The innate savagery would defy every decent consideration. Man's fallen nature would assert itself . . . and damn me."

"Leo, don't," I pleaded. "You terrify me. You don't mean it."

"I do mean it. So would every man who IS a man. Lots don't actually do it—but they want to."

I turned round to look at his white face and flashing eyes.

"Leo, you are wrong. No, I mean wrong about yourself. Whatever I did, you would always love

me. If you started to kill me, the minute you got your fingers round my throat, your heart would break and you would forgive me. There! You would. You see, after all, I know more about you than you know about yourself."

To my intense amazement, without a word of warning, he threw himself on his knees beside me, and hid his face against my heart. The strong savage had become a little child running, with tears, to his mother for comfort.

"Phyllis, Phyllis, of course you are right. But oh! my darling, don't fail me. Don't, ever, fail to love me best. Never let go of this life which you hold in the hollow of your hand. You don't know what you are to me, what your love is to me. No woman can. No woman can possibly even dream how a man loves. Though you never will understand it, *try* to understand and the rest, take on trust. Ah, if women knew how men love, they would think twice before marrying them. I often wonder how a woman dares to marry. But it's because she doesn't understand. Phyllis, I shall terrify you with this madness. But don't fail me my life. Don't break my heart."

He clung to me, exactly like a child in a fit of panic. I soothed, caressed, reassured him till the anguish was passed. But never to my dying day, shall I forget it—and never has Leo said or done anything which has so revealed his heart to me.

Two days later came Percivale's first Mass. I had not much sleep I must confess, upon the night of the 23rd. And I wondered if he slept. As I neared the chapel early next morning, I met Miss Douglas.

Her bright eyes were dim with crying. She looked quite broken.

My heart fluttered. Could there be bad news?

"I hope there is nothing wrong?" I asked, anxiously.

"No, no. Oh, I hope I didn't frighten you by my looks! Nothing is wrong. Everything is right, far more right than I ever shall deserve."

"What do you mean?" I asked, as she began to cry piteously. It moved me much to see this hard young woman in tears.

"I am engaged to be married," she sobbed. "The very day Mr. Ernest Langdon at Heathercombe Farm heard I was free, that Percivale was cured and wouldn't need me any more, he proposed to me. He is a gentleman farmer, you know. I have known him for years. But I never thought—— And he says it's my devotion to my brother that made him love me. And think what a fraud I feel! What an unwilling service I have given! And it's too late, now, to undo it."

"Don't, don't," I cried, putting my arm round her neck. "Oh, I am glad. But don't reproach yourself. It will come right in the end—I mean you will see how God will, somehow, twist it into good for you, and will set your mind at rest. He always does, with the very worst of our mistakes. I'm sure your brother wouldn't have had you different. Oh, I am glad. Is he nice? Do you like him?" I added, my thoughts straying to her lover.

She blushed divinely and sparkled through her tears. "He is very nice. And I am to have six months to see if I love him well enough to marry him," she said, demurely.

I hugged her. "Good luck to you both, and may you live happily ever afterwards."

She thanked me, with a choke, and then we went into chapel. At once, every other thought fled away from my mind.

It was a white feast again, so the beautiful lily vestments were laid out. And I saw, with awe, that a white and gold tabernacle had been added to the top of the altar, over whose door hung white curtains embroidered with lilies to match the chasuble. A brass lamp was another new feature. This was suspended from the ceiling and contained a clear ruby glass which was filled with oil, though not lighted. On the altar at the right hand side of the tabernacle, lay a little gold key, with gold tassel attached. And, beside the veiled chalice, stood a ciborium covered with a white and gold cover.

These elements had been absent at Father Humphreys's first Mass, and, with a thrill, I realised the supreme and sublime climax to which Percivale's whole life had been unconsciously tending. It was due to no human arrangement that his first Mass should be the one at which reservation of the Eucharist was restored again to Blackcombe, after long years. We had, none of us, arranged Leo's accident, still less Percivale's cure. All through, we had, each, been an unconscious actor in a divine drama, a passive tool in a Master Hand, the plastic clay shaped by the Great Potter upon the wheel of destiny. How wonderfully and exquisitely each detail had been carried out to the end! Every line of each life had been, for years, converging to this centre—the Blessed Sacrament. That morning,

Percivale was to enjoy a double consummation. He was at last to offer the supreme sacrifice and, at the same time, his were to be the hands which should first place the ciborium in the tabernacle, should first light the sanctuary lamp that had been so long extinguished in this hill-girt valley beside the weary sea. O strong white hands! In one miracle-filled hour, you will be doubly recompensed at last for all your barren years.

Then Leo came in softly, and knelt down beside me, giving me a look of such tender love, before he began his prayers, that it drew happy tears to my eyes. A few minutes later, the Randals appeared and then Father Humphreys got up, put a white cotta on over his cassock, and lighted the candles. Ah, at last, at last, he was to play second fiddle, I thought exultantly. I watched, breathless, as Percivale put on the alb which I had embroidered with so many sad and bitter thoughts. And I shared silently, in Mrs. Randal's joy at the sight of her chasuble upon his breast and back.

He looked marvellous, when fully vested. We had, none of us, ever before seen him in white. The shimmering satin cast a reflection on the always white face which made it look almost transparent, and enhanced the light from within which was already shining there. I think, for the first time, then, I began to realise that Percivale would not be with us much longer. But if I did, I was scarcely conscious of it until afterwards. My whole soul was absorbed in the Mass.

At the introit was struck at once the key note of the Mass—Motherhood, that divine, eternal Mother-

hood which I had learnt to love so dearly. There was a peculiar significance to me in this fact. It seemed so fitting that this should have been chosen for Percivale's first Mass—for him, the knight of Mary. And also that it should have been the Mass of Reservation.

Our delight deepened as the rite went on. Eagerly, I watched the presenting of wine and water at the offertory. Felix stood, with the cruets, awaiting the celebrant's pleasure, but he did not cross his hands as Percivale had done.

I wondered and wondered what he felt like when he reached the Canon. My own heart was beating till it nearly suffocated me. I watched the white profile turned towards the missal on the left hand, looked at the uplifted hands, which were as white and still as wax. There was no trace of outward emotion. Presently, he turned his head and joined his hands before his breast. I bowed my head, awe-struck, to whisper his name, for I knew that at that "commemoration of the living" mine would be mentioned. It was a long memento—the longest I have ever seen. Well, it was likely to be. All the memories of his life had to be pressed into it. At last, he unclosed his hands and went on with the Mass. Then he re-joined them and held them open above the oblation. If the oratory had been roofless, their shadow would have been thrown upon the chalice and the Host. So had the Most High once overshadowed a living ciborium, before becoming incarnate within it. Divine Motherhood, Eternal Fatherhood was symbolised there on the altar in front of me. Between the priest's fingers, as in the

womb of Mary, the Son of God would become Eucharistically Incarnate. By the priest's word, fraught with the power of the Holy Ghost, the Son of God would receive His form of material Being. Mystically, the priest is the Mother and Father of the Eucharist.

The silence was intense. I could hear every breath that Leo drew. At last Percivale took up the white Host, stooped low, lent his white mouth for God to speak through, and fell on one knee, adoring. He had not said "Hoc est enim Corpus Christi," but "Hoc est enim Corpus Meum." In that supreme moment, he had put on Jesus Christ.

Then he slowly lifted his Treasure up for all to see. I gazed reverently, rejoicing that the patient hands should indeed be filled and hallowed at last. Believing what he believed, I wondered how he could bear to lay his Treasure down. Bu tthere was no undue pause. All was in perfect accord with the rubrics, and, as usual, he was entirely calm. A few minutes later, came the elevation of the Chalice and again I rejoiced, this time at the thought of his lips so soon to be reddened with the Blood of Sacrifice.

After the consecration, the hush was as intense as it had been before it. There was not a sound till the low murmur "Nobis quoque peccatoribus." I fluttered again at the Communion bell, and watched the white priest drain the Chalice of its last drop. All was indeed now finished.

Then Leo left my side, to kneel at the little rail. He was the only Communicant. Percivale turned round and gave him the absolution. Then turned

again with the now tenanted Ciborium in his left hand, and held up a Host with his right—that weak right hand which I had so often clasped in mine. I closed my eyes and bowed my head, feeling almost dazed. But I was able to realise, with a thrill, that Leo was the first to receive Communion from the new ciborium. For the rest of the Mass, my soul was centred on my lover. It was the first time I had ever seen him at prayer. And now he had just performed the most solemn act of a Catholic's life. I turned to look at the bowed head hidden in his strong hands, and a pang shot through me as I realised that the deepest depths of my lover's soul were not for me. What was he saying and thinking? Was he speaking and thinking of me, I wondered? Then, very timidly, I stole my left hand under his right arm, knowing I was disturbing him, and expecting to be gently rebuffed. To my amazed delight, without lifting his head, he felt for my frightened hand with one of his, carried it to his lips and held it there, motionless. I thrilled through and through. I could feel the hot blood tingling even in my hands and feet. In a few seconds, he carried my hand very slowly, very tenderly to his breast and held it there to his heart. And I understood that he had thus sweetly placed me as near as he could to the Host, by holding my hand to his mouth till he had swallowed It, and then holding me against his heart. I knelt in ecstasy. Never before had I felt so near to Leo, so one with him. After all, God and his religion did not come between us as a barrier. Quite the contrary. At that most solemn time, Leo could pray undisturbed with me

so near to him. He did not rise for the last gospel, so deep was his absorption. I could not, of course, rise, either, and he did not release me till the beginning of the prayers after Mass. Then he kissed my hand, and gave it gently back to me with a smile. Ah, I wonder if he will ever realise how near he drew me to himself and God that morning!

I noticed that Father Humphreys did not extinguish the candles. He stood waiting till Percivale had unvested, then lighted a long taper at one candle, and handed it to his brother priest. We all watched eagerly as Percivale turned to the sanctuary lamp, and laid his flamed-tipped sceptre against the wick. In a few seconds, this kindled, and gave one clear tongue of fire—a tongue as red as love. I looked up at the beautiful Madonna and her blue star lamp, wondering if she would be jealous of earth's new star whose light dimmed her light. Then I believed that this very light, this blood-red star was the dearest of all earthly lights to Mary, Star of the Sea—and that for weary centuries she had watched and waited for its rising.

For centuries, Her Son, the Divine Outcast, had wandered, homeless, to and fro, by the wailing sea. What did the Mother's heart feel at seeing her Child housed at last? What benediction would rest for ever on Percivale for having taken in the Stranger and clothed Him, mystically, in the white vesture of the Sacramental Species? It seemed to me that more beautiful than the most exquisite melodies of Heaven would be these words which would ring for ever in the priest's ears, "I was a stranger, and you took Me in."

CHAPTER XXVII

A RED-HANDED SAINT

THE Randals departed as soon as the lamp was lighted but, according to my custom, I lingered on. That morning it was harder than ever to go. Leo had returned to his prayer and, apart from the two other men, Leo at prayer, enthralled me. Then there was Percivale's thanksgiving to watch . . . ah, what a thanksgiving! So far, after all my attendances at Mass, I had never out-stayed the priest. This time, I was determined I would, and settled myself to remain to the end of Percivale's silent pæan of praise. Poor foolish Phyllis! she little guessed the length of the time she would have had to wait, if she kept her resolution to the letter. Time would have been too short a measure. And eternity is long, long, long.

I changed my place when the Randals and Miss Douglas left, and went into the back bench, so that I might withdraw a little from the favoured three and watch them, without fear of distracting them.

And my thoughts were long and deep.

Sheltered there so safely, rich in the possession of my lover, blessed in having been the happy creature chosen to play the leading part in my friend's precious

life, I sat, in utter peace, looking back along the path of my destiny. All that I had been to Percivale, all that I had been allowed to do towards establishing his life's ambition, were, alone, sufficient to crown my own life with undying beauty. But, besides this, and exquisitely intermingled with it, was the priceless treasure of a man's love. It had indeed come to me at last, in overflowing, unstinted measure—a measure so vast that it was greater even than my own. It had been clear to me, since the scene with Leo on the terrace, that he loved me even better than I loved him, and this certainty, so far from filling me with regret for not loving him more, seemed a fitting consummation of our love. I was indeed well content to yield the palm to him, knowing he would never be entirely happy until I did so. I saw also how unimaginable love is and how nothing but itself, its actual possession, can give one any idea of it. Its own light is necessary that, in it, we may see light.

Then my gaze was attracted by the red light burning so steadily overhead. It was burning without the slightest flicker, almost like a lamp bewitched, or in a trance. I sat, wondering at its steadfastness . . . and then my thoughts reverted to my first visit to the chapel ruins in my heathen state. Gradually, tenderly, exquisitely, the whole panorama of Divine Love had revealed itself to me afar off: and now the shining lamp, speaking silently of a Mystic Presence, seemed to bring the vision wondrous near. Though belief in such a Presence was possible only to those possessing the gift of faith, I could feel how It appealed to my reason and my love,

as had every other dogma yet expounded to me. God's Presence as Spirit was not enough for beings compounded of flesh and spirit, both. Granted sufficient love for us and sufficient power to satisfy all the cravings of that love, what more natural than for God to put on flesh and share our entire nature? And finding even that condescension of love too inadequate, again what more natural than for Divine ingenuity to devise some means of dwelling always among us, and being constantly united with us? As usual, I found myself arguing from the human to the divine. Leo, my tremendous lover, would revel if he could take a form which would enable him to house himself within my breast. He would love to place his own heart close to mine, if he could, at the same time, retain it and his life, himself. How he would delight in feeding my soul with his soul, my body with his substance. How tenderly after death he would raise up my body with all its beloved attributes, the lips which had so often kissed him, the hands which had tended him, to dwell with him, to be his, for ever. Looked at in the light of a man's love, every doctrine of religion, the existence of God, His love of His creatures, His desire for union with them, the consequent assuming of our nature from the pure blood of a stainless woman, His life and death, His institution of the Sacraments, the eternal preservation of us creatures, body and soul, above everything, the central dogma of the Eucharist were, each and all of them, to me, so exquisitely natural, as to be almost inevitable. I could see nothing wild, far-fetched, impossible, or even difficult to believe. Percivale, Felix, Leo, any other true man would fain

have done the same for any woman he loved. And here was indeed a true Man, a perfect Man, a Man Who possessed infinite power, a Man Who was also God.

I gazed long, long, long at the lovely whole which now had come as near to me as the tabernacle and the love-red lamp. I could almost touch it, clasp it. It was so near that all my heart-sick craving was stilled in perfect peace. I was certain, the hand of God would soon touch me, as Leo had said it would.

After a time, my mind and eyes concentrated themselves upon Percivale, who had not moved since first kneeling down to make his thanksgiving. The other two were very still, but not so still as he. From each of them, one could hear an occasional deep breath, a slight movement: from him, nothing. He had crossed his arms upon the bench in front of him and had bowed his head down to rest on them. There, in that attitude, he remained, immovable.

I began to wonder if he had fainted or whether he was indeed in ecstasy. About the same time, some similar idea appeared to have struck Father Humphreys, for he suddenly raised his head and looked across at the still figure. At first, I was faintly surprised for I had never known him to do such a thing before. Then I noticed, with a thrill, that there was a look of concern on his face and that his eyes were dilated as if in alarm. A little later, he rose, and went over to his friend. I watched him stoop down, with paling cheeks; then Leo suddenly got up and looked round apprehensively at me. By this time, I was frightened, and stared fascinated, as Father Humphreys gently raised the bowed head,

to look into the white face which was hidden from me, because of my position at the rear of the chapel. Leo, stood, rooted. I saw him give one horrified glance at Father Humphreys, receive a similar look in return. Then he came quickly towards me, and almost lifting me up, led me from the chapel, with the peremptory command "You must come away, my darling. Percivale has fainted. Leave Humphreys and me to attend to him."

"I will go home, quite good, only if you promise to come to me at once, as soon as he can spare you," I pleaded. "You will, I know. Come to breakfast whenever you can be spared. I wish you would let me stay."

"No, no," he said hurriedly. "It may be another stroke, or some painful visitation like that. You must go, like a good little woman. Percivale himself would be the first to send you home, because he would wish you spared any pain."

Accordingly, I turned towards Halsanger. But my heart was fluttering and my limbs trembling. I had guessed the truth and only needed Leo to come and confirm it.

He was wonderfully quick and the moment I saw his white, embarrassed face, I saw he wanted help. He feared to break the news.

"My treasure," I said, nestling into his arms. "Have I got a silly presentiment, or was it something more than a faint or a stroke?"

"It was," he answered gravely, though still with eyes averted.

"Was it a visitation of God's great angel?"

"It was."

"He is dead?"

"Yes."

At first, we clung together, without speaking. I did not want to cry; even I could not shed tears at a thing so solemn and so glorious. After a bit, Leo led me gently to the couch and we sat there together.

"My darling, how brave you are," he murmured at last. "No fainting, no tears."

"Oh, don't praise me too early. The tears will come later. Just now, they would seem like desecration. Leo, isn't it marvellous? I can't think of anything but the triumphant *beauty* of the thing, can you?"

He shook his head.

"Isn't that what strikes you? Wouldn't it be the very death he himself would have most loved? Just think! He never spoke to anyone after his Mass. Those were his last words. His last action was to light that lamp. He died in the very hour of supreme victory. He died in God's Eucharistic Presence. Leo, think, we, his three best friends, actually saw him die!"

I still trembled but the tears did not come. They were burnt up in thoughts of Percivale. I had not yet begun to think of myself, ourselves, of life without him at Blackcombe."

"What made Father Felix suspect?"

"He heard him sigh. Just one long slow, utterly contented sigh, and after that, such a silence as wasn't consistent with life. He must have died just at that moment."

"Now, now, I understand what Dr. Randal meant," I exclaimed, the doctor's oracular words suddenly

returning to my memory. "He said it would last, his restored state, as long as life. I suppose he knew it was a supreme effort of human nature before the end . . . that it was, in fact, the sign of the end. Has he seen—him?"

"Yes. We sent at once. Humphreys and I carried him out and laid him on his bed. The doctor arrived at once. Oh, he said it was syncope—heart failure."

Again we clung together in silence. Then various considerations as to the carrying on of Percivale's ambition occurred to me.

"Leo, I wonder if he left a will? And what will happen to the chapel? I do hope his sister won't do away with it."

"Not she," he answered promptly. "Thank goodness, we arranged all that, only a few days ago, when we were discussing other business matters connected with my settling here. I told Percivale to leave the chapel to me to secure it, and the farmhouse, cottage and land to his sister. I promised to give her a fancy price for it, and buy her out entirely. She'll be willing enough, especially now she is going to be married."

"What are the arrangements to be?" I asked, after another pause. "Will he be buried at Seaford?"

"Not if I know it. I'll fight the whole Local Government Board, the Home Office, the Board of Health, the Home Secretary himself, every person, place, board and thing in England, rather than not have him buried in Blackcombe—under the altar where he first said Mass, under the tabernacle where he placed his Eucharist."

"Oh Leo, how lovely it would be! But can it be made legal?"

"Yes—if you know how to set to work. I am going up to town by the mail to-night, and shall come back armed with all necessary permissions, tomb, workmen, everything."

We spent the day together, not stirring out till nearly evening, when it was time for Leo to start to the station.

After he had gone, I made my fearful way down to the oratory in search of poor Father Humphreys. I longed to see him, to speak with him, to find out how he felt. I went straight to the farm where he always lodged and asked for him. Yes, he was in.

I looked up anxiously as he entered.

"Phyllis, how good of you to come," he exclaimed gratefully. "It was my place to come to you. But I have been too busy as you may guess. That poor woman!

"Who?"

"His sister. It's been awful. But I have got her away at last, to her future mother-in-law. She won't return here again, except for the funeral. I am truly thankful she has got a lover. Otherwise, I don't simply know how she would have got through. Her remorse is awful."

"Poor thing! But you, how are you, after such a shock?" I asked, anxiously.

I saw his lip tremble but he mastered it at once.

"I don't know that it was such a shock, really," he said, slowly. "Somehow I have been expecting him to go soon. I never dreamt it would be so soon, though. I was amazed when I lifted his head."

"I am so glad it was you," I said, huskily. "I am so glad anointed hands were the first to touch him. Oh, I wonder if you feel what I feel—that it was as perfect as it could be?"

"I feel it infinitely more than you ever can," he answered, almost sharply. "I feel it as only a priest can. From beginning to end, in every main issue, and every unimportant detail, eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived a life and a death more divinely lovely."

I was silent. Speech had flown, abashed.

"You will think me crazy to quote Browning at such a time as this" he resumed at last, with the flicker of a smile. "And yet, all day, some lines from Rabbi Ben Ezra have been ringing perversely in my head.

> 'The new wine's foaming flow,
> The Master's lips aglow,
> Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needest
> thou with earth's wheel?'

"I love the idea—that each of us is created to slake the Master's thirst. Happy cup! And happy Master! Think of the depth and richness of the draught He has drunk to-day, will drink for ever from that white priest-soul."

His voice broke a little at this point.

"I must tell you of his vision," he began again. "In any case it wasn't sub sigillo and he also gave me permission, after his death if I survived, him to tell it to anyone whom it would comfort."

"He told me himself," I interrupted, eagerly. "That was, now I think of it, the very last talk we ever had."

"Did he? I am glad. It has brought Heaven nearer to me than I ever thought it could be, in this world. In any case, nothing brings Heaven so near as the loss of a heart-friend. I suppose there is nothing which so revolutionises life as the passing of one's twin soul. Think how he is gazing now on the Beatific Vision, how he knows all the mysteries which we so often discussed together. Think of his countless Masses after the last day in the eternal sanctuary of Heaven.

"Yes," he went on, smiling at my astonished stare. "It is a secret conviction of mine that we priests shall offer Mass in Heaven. 'Thou art a priest for ever,' remember. And it is inconceivable that our sacred character should pass with time. One half of it's powers will be no longer needed, when there are no more sinners to be absolved or Sacraments to be given. But the larger half, the essential, God's side, will remain. I am sure He will let us still offer the Divine Sacrifice, no longer in reparation, but in praise. That is the end without end of every priest-soul—to offer infinite, eternal praise. Think of all our beloved Masses just as they are now, only with Mary and the saints visibly present, with the Victim, the Divine Victim, visible, unveiled at last. Think of the Communions with Our Lord, when He will be no longer hidden under the species. That is my conception of Heaven: the Beatific Vision of God: the vision of the Mass and the Eucharist unveiled at last: and the union with God according to our whole nature. By the way, Phyllis, have you seen him?" he broke off, suddenly.

"No," I answered, beginning to tremble.

"He is in the oratory," he continued, rising. "Come with me. Mr. Wedderburn telegraphed at once for a temporary coffin which arrived from Seaford this afternoon. One of the priests and several Catholics are coming from Seaford this evening to stay for a few days in Blackcombe. They and Mr. Wedderburn's servants will help me to keep the watch."

I followed Father Humphreys to the oratory where I found that the front bench had been moved to make room for the trestles and coffin. There were no flowers—only a crucifix and lighted candles, besides Mary's blue lamp and the red one which burnt on as calmly as if there were no death.

I walked up to the open coffin and gazed in, awestruck. Never before had I seen death, and the first sight of it is an epoch.

But this dead man was my friend, friend dearer than any human tongue can say. And my friend looked like a king.

I gazed in silence. They had vested him as if for Mass, so he was clothed for his eternal oblation, in the linen alb which my hands had made. The white vestments, too, were there, and he lay, a conqueror indeed, with his white hands crossed over the embroidered lilies on his quiet breast. The bright dark eyes were closed, and on the transparent face was a shadowy smile of triumph. The lines of pain were almost obliterated. He looked a conqueror, a king.

Even then I could not weep. The whole thing was too utterly sublime. I stood gazing until daylight died entirely away. And then a sweet thing

happened. When all other light had gone, the red lamp held its own against the two wax candles. The coffin was placed just underneath it, and its ruby glow fell on the white crossed hands, once so helpless, now so strong, so doubly hallowed, so victorious in death. I beckoned Father Humphreys to approach. He had left me and was kneeling in prayer at the back of the chapel.

"Look," I murmured. "Look at my white-handed saint. All through those weary years, he kept his barren hands undefiled in God's service, for God's own sake. And now at last, at last they are red with the Blood of Sacrifice."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE QUICKENING

AND now I come to the last chapter of my book.

To the best of my ability, I have set down my own love-story and the life-story of my white-handed saint.

In looking back through these pages, I realise the miserable inadequacy of my efforts to do justice to Percivale. In future years, I hope that someone more gifted—some man, some priest who will tell the story as no woman can—may write of him objectively. For me, there was only one way—to paint him as I saw him, and to paint the effect of his faith on my own soul. As, line by line, I have set down, minutely, what I saw of this mystic's life, so, line by line, I have also unconsciously described the process of my soul's awakening. When I first met this priest, my soul existed and that was all. It existed negatively, like an inanimate seed buried safely in the dark earth. But life began to stir within it upon that evening when I first spoke to Percivale in the ruins, and this life has germinated till the soul was ready to receive from God its breath of immortal life—faith, that life of the soul.

Two things yet remain to show: the consumma-

tion of my love-story, which brought the gift of faith at last, and how this crowning grace came to me while Mass was being offered in his oratory where his white soul finds its heaven, and his white body rests under the feet of the priest as he offers sacrifice.

The oratory has been enlarged by the addition of Percivale's cottage. Thus, what was the scene of his daily life is now within the precincts of the chapel. His body rests triumphant beneath a great slab of white marble which forms the pavement of the little sanctuary.

The chapel is becoming a place of pilgrimage, in a quiet way, for Percivale's brother-priests. Sometimes, they come alone, sometimes in pairs. Sometimes they are weighted with a cross, sometimes they come in pure thanksgiving. But whether they are in sorrow, doubt, temptation, darkness or gladness, no one goes away without receiving the grace he sought. It is one of these who will, I hope, write his life again and who will publish with it, his book of confessions in full.

It lies beside me now, that precious manuscript book. I take it up tenderly, and turn to the last entry he ever wrote, partly because it is the last and partly because I feel its truth in my every nerve to-night. He says:

"Lord, besides the realisation of our immortality, the vision has brought me another realisation, that of our oneness, our unity in Thee. When we are separated from those whom we love, it is our bodies which make the separation, which weigh down our souls. Immediately after death, when the soul is

free, and time, space, and material, corporeal things no longer have power, by means of the body, to fetter the soul—we shall always see our friends, they will always be present to us, never again absent. We shall see them in the presence, the mind, the heart of God, and we shall have the power to fly to them, from one end of the world to the other, in a flash of time.

"And after a certain point of perfection and degree of love (human and divine) has been attained and the body thus spiritualised, even while still in the flesh, much of this state can be realised. We are, in truth, all really present, close to each other, *in Thee*—even though we cannot have the intellectual vision of our unity and proximity. It is none the less real for our inability to see it wholly. If a lover hides from his bride behind a curtain, the fact that she cannot see him, does not alter his presence there or his closeness to her. Our bodies are the veil. That is all. And when we can, to a certain extent, transcend our senses and live more as spirits in glorified, spiritualised bodies, we realise how intensely near our dear ones, really are, in Thee. We are never, never outside Thine omnipresence. How close that keeps us to each other!

"Again, when I think very intently of an absent friend and feel a great flow of love gushing out to him from my heart, then my mind and heart, or in one word, my soul, are virtually present with him, even though actually fettered by my body."

And you, my friend, who are no longer fettered by your flesh, you are watching beside me as I write. Your hallowed presence permeates all Blackcombe. True to your vision and your desire, you are always among us—the only one to offer perfect praise for us imperfect mortals. At first, after your death,

I wondered if I was sometimes ashamed for you to see me always, in my worst moments. But now I know I am not. I can say:

> "Be with me when I climb or fall,
> Ye watch, like God, the rolling hours,
> With larger, other eyes than ours
> And make allowance for us all."

It is the night of Lady Day, and, unless I had been gently upheld by Omnipotent Strength, I think it must have been my last day on earth. The joys of the Lady Mass must, otherwise, have been too much for frail human flesh.

Already, I have written of two Masses—both of them Mary Masses, both of them unique. Now, I have to write of a third and one which, though not so in itself, is, to me, the most wonderful of the trinity.

I went up alone from this house to the chapel, through a silent white world. Snow fell last night, yet one early thrush was singing his heart out in a bare sycamore whose branches were tipped with tiny red buds. His song was so sweet, so welcome, that it brought sudden tears to my eyes. It seemed to me that he sang of the eternal verities, of life, love, unfailing spring. Earth lay snug under this white quilt of late snow, and new-born lambs gambolled unconcernedly on its frozen surface, filling the air with their shrill young bleating. Now and then, the deep single note from some patient dam would punctuate the treble chorus, and as usual, the organ swell of the sea accompanied these voices of earth. The new-born sun was overcast by a haze of coming snow which he had transformed to deep daffodil-gold.

There was no sharp definite shine—no visible cloud-shape—nothing but a soft sky of richest daffodil.

The still air was full of the promise of life. And, once more, it was a white and gold world. I remembered that other white and gold world, the world of gorse and blackthorn when the cuckoos were calling. This morning, there was a division of the tints. The white was over the earth, but the gold confined to Heaven.

And when I entered the chapel, I found that the white altar was adorned with graceful daffodils, so earth's white and Heaven's gold were both represented and met together, there, in the light of the blood-red lamp.

Lady Day is, of course, a white feast—the whitest in all the year to me. Father Humphreys was, as usual, served by Leo. As the rite proceeded, I was more and more filled with the thought of that incredible Love which constrained God, the limitless Spirit, to weight Himself with matter and dwell in the narrow tabernacle of a woman's breast. One point shone out among all others—His freedom of choice in the thing. Hitherto I had not realised that, if He had chosen, He could have saved the world in many other ways. He need not have become Man. Or He need not have had a human Mother. He need not have passed through the phases of infant and child life. All things were possible to Him. Yet He chose this thing from among them all. What Love, what incomprehensible Love!

Even when the bell tinkled at the Sanctus, I was still unconscious of what would befall me, within

ten minutes when the bell should speak again. I bent down, as Leo had taught me to, when the priest spreads his hands over the oblation. Then, at his genuflection, I raised myself to lift my eyes to the Host and, as I gazed, came the double miracle. At that most holy moment, I felt my unborn babe quicken into life within me.

The power of the Most High had overshadowed me. High God Himself had bent down to our wedded love and breathed into it the breath of eternal life. I, a trembling woman, felt life come forth from her mysterious kingdom and enter into me. I, a trembling woman, was entrusted by God with a newly-created soul—a being made from no material elements, a being of whom God alone was Father and Mother, a being made like unto its Divine progenitor, created from His own substance, breathed into me by His own breath.

In an ecstasy of awe and happiness, I bent down again with the priest's second genuflection. It seemed to me that the bell thrilled in Leo's hand as if my husband already knew that our mutual love had put on immortality.

Trembling, almost sobbing, I found myself making my first deliberate act of adoration. During the hush which accompanies the consecration of the Chalice, I found myself adoring God, once woman-born, lying incarnate on the altar behind the white veil of the Sacramental species.

Then, as I raised my tear-filled eyes to the uplifted Chalice, I realised the second miracle. Faith was mine at last. It was no longer a beautiful object outside myself. It was no longer even so far off as

the tabernacle and the lamp. As my babe's soul entered my body, with it, the gift of faith breathed forth by the same God, entered triumphant into my ravished soul.

The Eucharist, on the day of Percivale's first Mass, had brought faith to within arm's length of me. Now that same Eucharist had borne it, by means of motherhood, into the very centre of my soul at last.

For a time, my awe and rapture were so intense that I think I almost lost consciousness. But, at the Communion bell, the gold mist cleared and I saw what God, the Great Gentleman, had done. Only He could have conceived anything so delicate, so tender.

In our chapel, as I have already said, when the celebrant stands at the altar to offer sacrifice, he is standing on Percivale's grave, with his feet exactly over the quiet heart of our white-handed saint. So as Father Humphreys stood with the heart of a priest beneath his feet, and the Heart of God uplifted in his hands, came the supreme moment chosen by the Most High to work the double miracle for poor, unworthy me.

I looked at Leo, and I knew that he and I were—are—now indeed grappled together for time and eternity by an indestructable chain which nothing less than Infinite Love could have forged and that, only in the central fires of His human Heart.

I wept softly not only for joy but because the beauty of God's tender love was so vivid as to be almost pain. And with the tears came the young mother's first unerring intuition.

A radiant light flooded my soul and, in the glow, I saw that my babe will be a priest. Animated at a moment so ineffably holy, the mantle of our white-handed saint has fallen upon him and marked him for the service of the Most High.

The happy soul now stirring within me will, one day, be sealed with the royal signet of Order. The rosebud of a mouth soon to drink life from near my heart, will, one day, pronounce the awful words of Consecration, be reddened with the Blood of Sacrifice. The feeble hands soon to clasp my fingers will, one day, be strong enough to lift up the Infinite between earth and Heaven.

Verily, God is Love.

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